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THE
ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

BY
FLORENCE MARRYAT.
(MRS. FRANCIS LEAN.)

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



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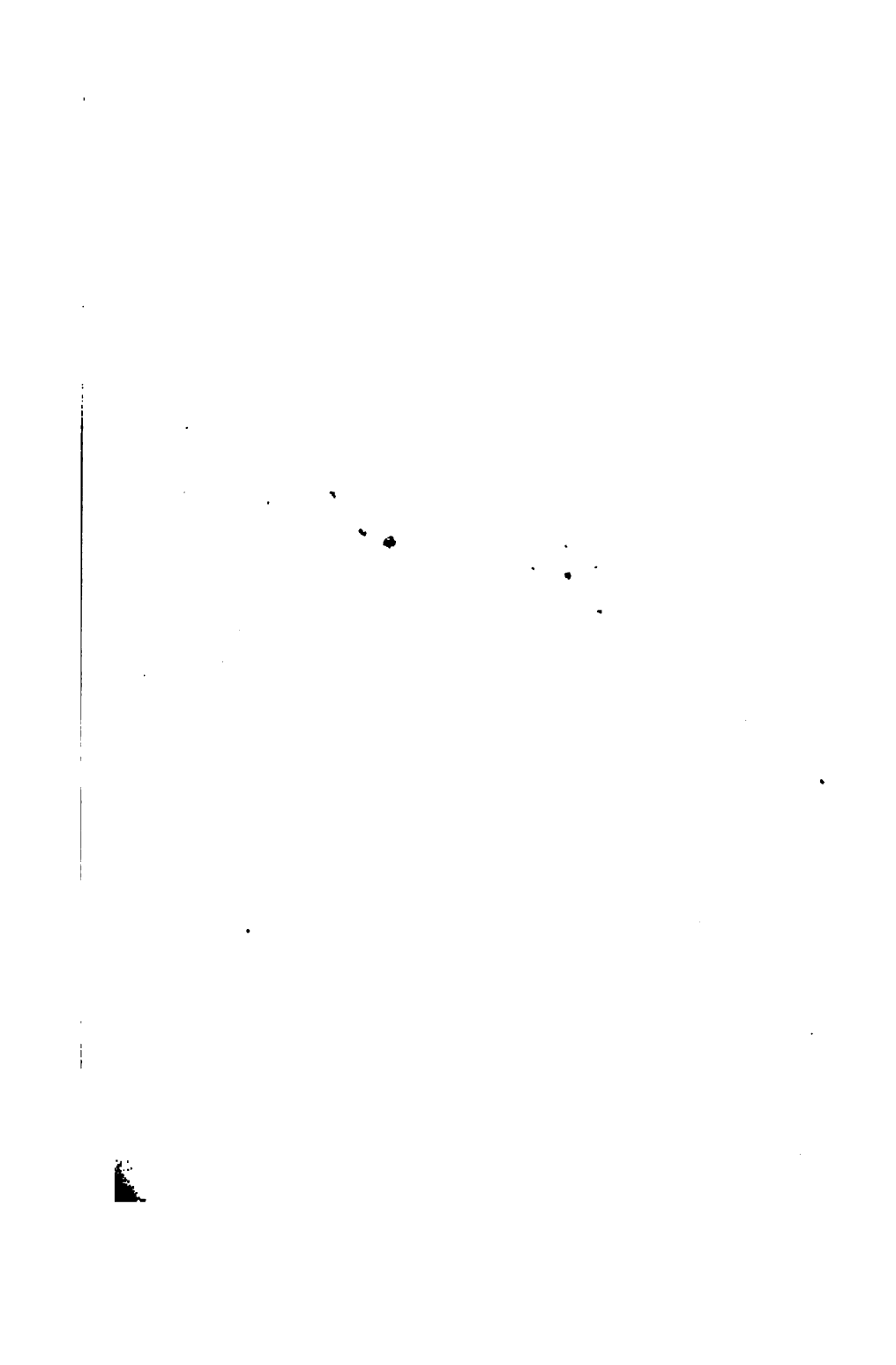
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THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.



CHAPTER I.

YOU MUST PLAY YOUR CARDS VERY CAREFULLY.

IT was at an evening party at Mrs. Stingo's, not many years ago, that two old men and two old women were talking scandal across the whist-table that stood in an ante-chamber to the reception-room. Everybody accepted the invitations of Mrs. Stingo. She was not a lady, she was ignorant, uncultivated, and rude in her manners; but then her husband had amassed a fortune in trade, and whether

honestly or dishonestly made no difference to Mrs. Stingo's acquaintance. She had a fine house and a fine carriage: wore handsome dresses and gave good suppers; and if one can get so much out of one's friends, what is the use of inquiring by what means their luxuries were gained?

Such at least was the opinion of the ladies who were playing whist in the ante-chamber. The older and uglier of the two was Lady William Nettleship, the widow of the sixth son of the Duke of Mudford, whose grand family had never taken any notice of her existence.

She was very poor and very grasping, and would stoop to the lowest devices to save a penny. Yet there were people who, on account of her title, would fawn upon her and flatter her vanity, and lend her half-crowns which she always forgot to return; and amongst the most conspicuous of these was

Mrs. Runnymede, the lady who sat opposite to her. She was a stout overblown matron of fifty, whose husband, if alive, was never alluded to.

She had been cut by the larger portion of society, and was thankful, even at the expense of many half-crowns, to hang on to the skirts of any woman who bore the shadow of respectability about her. The partners with whom Lady William Nettleship and Mrs. Runnymede were playing, were Mr. Rufus Farthingale, an astute little lawyer, and Colonel Crossman, a male busybody who spent all his time going from one house to another, collecting bits of scandal to retail to the fashionable press.

‘I cannot believe it,’ exclaimed Lady William, sharply. ‘All Sir Peregrine’s money to go to the missing grandson Vivian Chasemore! Are you quite sure that it’s true?’

She was a skinny, dried-up-looking old lady, whose features twitched incessantly with incipient paralysis. She seemed to be particularly interested in the subject in hand, for as she leaned forward to question the lawyer, her head shook so as to set the gold butterflies in her cap into violent agitation.

‘I am quite sure, my lady,’ replied Mr. Farthingale, with a smile of secret satisfaction. ‘Having enjoyed the confidence of the late Sir Peregrine for many years past, I knew of his decision long before it was made public. Besides it is no secret. The will was read out before the whole family.’

‘Well, *I* never heard of it before, and *we* are most intimate with Sir Arthur,’ returned Lady William.

‘Perhaps Sir Arthur does not consider it part of his duty to make his grandfather’s

wishes public. But it is well known amongst his friends.'

'It is the most astounding piece of news!' said Mrs. Runnymede. 'Poor Sir Arthur not to have a halfpenny of the money, unless his cousin Vivian continues missing. What does he say to it, Mr. Farthingale?'

'He seems to bear the suspense very well, Mrs. Runnymede, and takes an active interest in the search that is being made for Mr. Vivian.'

'Oh, because he is in hopes of getting proofs of his death, of course!'

'That I cannot tell you, madam; but we have the strongest reason to believe that he may still be alive, in which case he is sure to turn up before long.'

'Well, everybody has been led to consider him dead for the last four years, and I think it will be the very height of selfishness and inconsideration in the young man if he is

alive after all,' remarked Lady William, in the same acid tone. 'What made him run away from home in the first instance?'

'An unhappy disagreement, I understand, with his stepmother. His father, the late General Chasemore, chose, when Mr. Vivian was already twenty years of age, to marry again, and his choice unfortunately fell on a lady who was addicted to—that is, who had a weakness for——'

'*What?*' demanded Mrs. Runnymede, as she stared the little lawyer full in the face with her bold black eyes.

Mr. Farthingale seemed to be in a dilemma.

'It is difficult to speak of such things before ladies of your position,' he murmured, after a pause; 'but the fact is that the second Mrs. Chasemore had what the doctors term an inclination to the use of alcoholic stimulants, which caused much

dissension and unhappiness in her family circle.'

'Oh, is that all!' said Lady William, contemptuously. 'That's common enough nowadays, I can tell you. I could point out half-a-dozen women in this room to-night who do the same thing.'

The subject did not seem to interest Mrs. Runnymede. She leaned over the table to Lady William and whispered :

'How beautiful Miss Nettleship is looking this evening!'

The remark was irrelevant, but it seemed to distract the mother's attention.

'Where is she? Ah, talking to Sir Arthur Chasemore! I thought as much. They are *such* friends. But I should like her to hear this story. Would you step across the room, colonel, and bring my daughter to me? Say I wish to speak to her for a moment.'

The old colonel rose stiffly from his chair to do the lady's bidding, and in a few minutes returned with Miss Nettleship upon his arm.

‘What is it you require of me, mamma?’ she said indifferently.

Regina Nettleship was not a pretty woman, but she was very handsome. There was no rippling charm about her laughter: no quick, sweet lightning in the flash of her eye, that would have made a man turn back to look at her. She was tall, fair, and perfectly self-possessed, with good features and a fine figure; but her eyes and her mouth were cold, and her whole manner reserved. She looked like a queen, but a queen that kept her subjects at a distance. She was almost shabbily attired in a black net dress that had turned brown with age, and a pair of gloves that had been both cleaned and mended. Yet no one could have mistaken her for other

than she was ; a gentlewoman with good blood in her.

‘ Mr. Farthingale is telling us such a wonderful story, Regina, and I want you to listen to it. It is all about Sir Arthur’s cousin, that eccentric young man who disappeared from his home some years ago, and now it seems that Sir Peregrine has left all his fortune to him. Here, my dear, just sit down on the edge of my chair and hear what Mr. Farthingale has to say on the subject. It is really most interesting and romantic.’

‘ Thank you, mamma, but I would rather stand !’ replied Regina.

‘ I was just telling Lady William,’ said Mr. Farthingale, recommencing, in deference to the new-comer, ‘ that, four years ago, owing to some unhappy dissensions at home, Mr. Vivian Chasemore left his father’s house and never returned to it. At the time of General Chasemore’s death, the young man

was advertised for, but did not respond, so it was concluded he was dead himself or had left the country. The grandfather, Sir Peregrine, never made any sign on these occasions; but two months ago, when he died and his will was opened, it was found that he had always looked upon Mr. Vivian as his favourite, and passing over his elder son's child, the present baronet, and all his other grandchildren, had left the whole of his fortune to Vivian Chasemore, in case he reappeared within three years' time, during which period an unremitting search is, by the provisions of the will, to be made for him. Of course it was a disappointment to Sir Arthur, who has only his very small patrimony and his profession on which to keep up the title. However, should his cousin not be found within the stipulated time, the fortune is to revert to him, so he has still a chance.'

‘Oh, Mr. Vivian will *not* be heard of, depend upon it!’ exclaimed Lady William, confidently.

‘I am not so sure of that, my lady. I think there is every likelihood of his returning as soon as the advertisements which we have sent out catch his eye.’

‘But if he is alive, why didn’t he come forward at his own father’s death? Didn’t he inherit some money then, Mr. Farthingale?’

‘None at all. General Chasemore died in debt; and his widow, I am sorry to say, daily intrenches on the small provision made for her.’

‘Should Mr. Vivian return, he is hardly likely to offer his stepmamma a home, then?’

‘Hardly indeed! It was her conduct that drove him away. It is a great pity he was brought up to no profession. It was rumoured after his disappearance that he had gone on

the stage ; but, if so, he has changed his name, and we have lost sight of him.'

'Well, this is a pretty story altogether ! What do you think of it, Regina ?' said Lady William.

Regina had looked very thoughtful as she listened to the lawyer's recital ; but the voice in which she had answered her mother's question was carelessness itself.

'Is it necessary that I should think anything about it at all, mamma ? Sir Arthur's affairs cannot possibly concern us.'

'They concern the whole of society, my dear. A young man who has disgraced himself, as Mr. Vivian Chasemore has, to be permitted to take the bread, as it were, out of his own cousin's mouth ! I call it shameful !'

'It will not be quite so bad as that, my lady,' interposed Mr. Farthingale. 'Sir Arthur has his profession, you know, and a few hundreds beside. Still, fifty thousand

pounds is not a sum to be relinquished without a single regret.'

'*Fifty thousand pounds !*' cried Mrs. Runnymede, with uplifted hands ; ' is it really so much as that ? And all belonging perhaps to a low actor ! How unequally the mercies of Heaven are distributed in this world ! Fifty thousand pounds ! Well, I never ! And should Mr. Vivian Chasemore be alive, Mr. Farthingale, how soon shall you hear of it ?'

' We expect to have news of him every day, madam. The bloodhounds of the law are after him in every direction. Sir Arthur is as anxious for intelligence as any of us. He is a fine character. We see a great deal of him. He constantly honours our humble dwelling.'

Lady William regarded the little lawyer with her keen eyes suspiciously. He also had a daughter, whom some people thought good-looking, and who was reputed sole

heiress to a considerable sum of money. Miss Regina's mother sniffed danger in the air.

'Oh, Sir Arthur is a great deal at your house, is he? I suppose Miss Selina is the attraction there—eh, Mr. Farthingale?'

'Oh, now, really, your ladyship must excuse me. I know nothing of young ladies' fancies, nor young gentlemen's either—I do not, upon my word! But Sir Arthur has naturally a great deal of business to transact with me at present; and he and Selina appear to have a mutual inclination for music. Sir Arthur possesses a fine voice.'

'Does he? I have never heard it. Runnymede' (Lady William had a most offensive habit of addressing those whom she considered her inferiors by their surnames), I shan't play any more to-night. I think it is time we paid a little attention to our hostess. How do we stand with regard to

the pool? Oh, I see! I owe Colonel Crossman seven-and-sixpence. Just pay him, there's a good soul! for I've no change, and remind me of it to-morrow. Come, Regina!

‘Where are you going now, mamma?’

‘Into the next room, my dear, to speak to Mrs. Stingo.’

But on their way there Lady William drew her daughter aside into a sort of conservatory that stood upon the landing.

‘Regina, you must play your cards very carefully with regard to Sir Arthur.’

‘I don't understand you, mamma. I have no cards to play.’

‘You understand perfectly. But you are as obstinate as your father was before you. Cannot you see that little lawyer's game? He wants to catch the baronet for his vulgar daughter, and will do all he can to find Vivian Chasemore in consequence. That is

why he goes spreading the story in every direction. It's to keep other people off. He knows that his money-bags will be some inducement to Sir Arthur, as things are at present; but should he come into his grandfather's fortune, Miss Selina may whistle for him!

‘And what is all this to me?’

‘Really, Regina, you are the most provoking girl in existence! To hear you talk, one would imagine you had been born with a gold spoon in your mouth. But fifty thousand pounds, my dear! Only think of it! *Fifty thousand pounds!* For Heaven's sake, don't let it slip between your fingers!’

Lady William's face turned almost green with envy as she mouthed the amount of Sir Peregrine's fortune, and clutched at the trimming of her daughter's shabby dress with her claw-like hand as though to entreat her consideration.

‘Go on, mamma,’ said Regina. ‘What do you want me to do?’

‘I want you to keep good friends with Sir Arthur, without entangling yourself—he *may* have the money after all, you know—but you mustn’t go too far, as you may not be able to draw back when necessary. There is no saying what the next few days may bring forth. You heard Mr. Farthingale’s opinion—that news may be received of Vivian Chasemore at any moment.’

‘And then——’

‘*And then*—upon my word, Regina, any one, to see you stare at me in that extraordinary manner, would say you had not the full use of your senses. Why, of course, in such an emergency, your instinct will teach you the best thing to do. But, meanwhile, you must not be more than friendly with Sir Arthur. You see how the land lies—should his cousin be found, the man has positively

nothing but a few hundreds and his beggarly profession to depend upon. How can he bear the suspense? One day of it would kill me. But there is Mrs. Stingo beckoning to us—we must positively go. But remember, Regina, you must keep Sir Arthur in play.'

'One minute, mamma. This business is mine, and you must allow me to conduct it my own way. You need not be afraid. I know perfectly well what I am about, but I can't be dictated to, or have my actions commented upon.'

'Oh, very well! You must do as you choose. But don't say afterwards that I haven't warned you!' exclaimed Lady William, as she hurried into the presence of her hostess.

Mrs. Stingo was surrounded by a bevy of such guests as she loved to gather about her—people who had much higher birth than

herself, and much lighter purses ; and who considered, therefore, her good dinners and suppers to be equivalents for the honour they did her in enrolling her name on their visiting list. There was Mrs. Macdougall of Macdougall—*the* Macdougall, as she was familiarly termed—an old Scotchwoman, who wore cairngorms as big as walnuts on her withered neck, and dined, for half the week, upon red herrings. *The* Macdougall laboured under the hallucination that Scotland was the greatest and most virtuous country in the world, and that she was the biggest person that had ever issued from it.

She had the smallest and most contemptible opinion of Lady William Nettleship, who was ‘only the widow of an English duke’s son,’ whereas *the* Macdougall maintained that all *her* ancestors had been kings. Indeed, these two ladies’ claims to high birth and knowledge of each other’s impe-

cuniosity had made them deadly enemies, and they could scarcely converse together with politeness even in public. Next to the Macdougall sat Miss Selina Farthingale, whose position being low enough for patronage, made her rather a favourite with Lady William's rival. She was a dark woman, of five or six and twenty, with sharp pointed features and a cunning expression which was unpleasant to most people. She had little taste either, which was evinced by the profuse blond trimmings on her lavender silk dress, and the scarlet geraniums in her hair. Miss Selina had her admirers, however, and she fondly hoped that Sir Arthur Chasemore, who was leaning over the back of her chair, was one of them. But the alacrity with which the baronet left her side to rejoin Miss Nettleship, would have inspired some doubts in the mind of an unbiassed spectator.

‘Dress cut a great deal too low,’ remarked the Macdougall in an unnatural whisper to Miss Selina Farthing, as Regina entered the room. ‘I ca’ it indee-cent—positively indee-cent.’

Miss Selina shrugged her mottled shoulders out of her lavender silk dress, in expression of her disgust at seeing Regina’s.

‘We mustn’t be too hard,’ she whispered in the chieftainess’s ear. ‘The stuff may have run short, you know.’

‘Weel, she had better cut a yaird off her train and soo it at the top, then,’ grumbled the elder lady, whilst the clear cairngorms looked like dull fishes’ eyes, viewed from the background of her parchment-coloured neck.

‘And now I suppose you all want your supper!’ cried Mrs. Stingo, in her coarse voice; ‘so the sooner you get down to it the better. Sir Arthur, give your arm to Mrs. Macdougall, and mind you help her to the

best of all that's on the table. She never says a word about my suppers, but she pays me the compliment of eating them, as every one knows.'

'I fancy the Scotch constitution is somewhat akin to that of the boa tribe, and can lay in a month's provisions at a sitting,' remarked Lady William, almost before the Macdougall had disappeared.

'Now, Lady William, that's very spiteful of you! No one's to blame for their poverty, you know; that's what I say. Colonel Crossman, will you escort Mrs. Runnymede to the supper-room? There's a first-rate lot of Madeira at the head of the table, Mrs. Runnymede. I had it put out of the way of the young ones on purpose. Now, Lady William, here's Mr. Stingo waiting to hand you down—and Miss Selina will go with Mr. Pennycuick.' And so Mrs. Stingo ran on until all her guests had disappeared, two and

two, like Noah's animals going into the ark, and taken possession of the supper-room. It was evident that, however dull the evening had been, they enjoyed themselves here. For a while nothing was to be heard but the clatter of knives and forks, and the ring of glasses and china, mixed with occasional remonstrances from Mrs. Runnymede and various other ladies, as the gentlemen insisted upon re-filling their glasses, which subsided into murmurs of pleasure, and a trickling sound, as the liquor found its way down their throats.

At last, though all the world knew this was what they had come for, Mrs. Stingo's visitors felt compelled to rise, and then Mrs. Runnymede asked for a cab to be called, and Lady William proposed they should all go home together.

'Don't let us accompany her to-night,' whispered Regina to her mother, as Mrs.

Runnymede came laughing and talking loudly into the hall, with her cloak half falling off her shoulders, and her black eyes looking bolder than before.

‘What nonsense ! What will you say next ?’ replied Lady William ; ‘ we *must* go together, we are to share the cab.’

Regina shrunk backwards, as her mother passed with Mrs. Runnymede to the vehicle ; and when she had followed them, she sat silent, with an averted face, until the cab reached their friend’s house.

‘ Now, Runnymede ! you must give me your share of the expense,’ said Lady William, as she tried to extract the purse from that lady’s hands. But Mrs. Runnymede was too sharp for her. She held her purse tightly, and made a calculation.

‘ Eighteenpence for three,’ she remarked, ‘ so my share will be sixpence.’

‘ No such thing ! it’s ninepence at the very

least,' replied Lady William. 'It's a beautiful night, and Regina and I would have walked home if it hadn't been for you.'

Mrs. Runnymede was still trying to solve this puzzle, when her friend snatched a shilling from her hand.

'This will do,' she said; 'you would have had to pay it if you had come by yourself, so it's exactly the same thing.'

And before the other had time to expostulate, she found herself pushed out upon the pavement in front of her own door, whilst the cab rolled away with Lady William and her daughter.

They lived in second-rate lodgings in Knightsbridge, and when they arrived there, the inmates of the house had gone to rest. Regina crept as quickly as she could into the sitting-room, but her mother remained upon the door-step for at least ten minutes whilst she haggled with the cab-driver to accept the

shilling she had abstracted from Mrs. Runnymede as his entire fare, and he called her by every name in his vocabulary for being so stingy. At last the warfare terminated by Lady William flinging the money into the gutter, and slamming the door in the man's face. As she entered the sitting-room, she saw her daughter seated at the table with her head in her hands.

‘Why, what’s the matter with you now, Regina? I must say you are very selfish; you never will help me in these little difficulties, and these wretched cabmen are growing more extortionate every day. Are you ill?’

‘No, mamma,’ said the girl, as she raised her heavy eyes, and cold, proud face to confront Lady William.

‘You look as white as a sheet! What was Sir Arthur saying to you in the hall just before the cab came?’

‘He asked leave to call here to-morrow.’

‘I hope he is not going to propose to you!’ exclaimed her mother, in real alarm. ‘It will be most awkward and inopportune if he does. Now, mind, Regina, what I said to you. You must not commit yourself either way.’

‘I will remember it, mamma.’

‘Really, I wish I had known of this before; we would have said we were going out of town for a week, and so put him off.’

‘For Selina Farthingale to make love to in our absence,’ rejoined Regina, with a sneer.

‘Oh no, my dear! that would never do. Well, I suppose it is all for the best; but it’s a case that requires the neatest handling, and if you make a mess of it, I’ll never speak to you again.’



CHAPTER II.

‘NO MORE DEAD THAN YOU ARE.’

WHEN Regina Nettleship came down to breakfast the next morning, she was still undecided as to what she should say in the event of Sir Arthur Chasemore proposing to her. She felt it was very likely he would do so. She had known him now for six months, during the whole of which time he had paid her marked attention. But at the beginning of their acquaintance he had been only plain Arthur Chasemore, with his profession as a barrister for a means of subsistence, and she had snubbed him in proportion. When he

inherited the baronetcy, and, as she and her mother had fondly imagined, a fortune on which to keep up his title, things looked different, and Miss Nettleship had encouraged the young man to an extent which would fully justify him in believing she would accept his offer of marriage. And now, notwithstanding Lady William's admonitions, she could not make up her mind what to do. Not that she loved Sir Arthur. She loved no one in this world, and nothing, unless it were the prospective chance of a life of ease and affluence. She was sick of poverty. She had been reared in an atmosphere of falsehood and fraud, and in her ideas the want of money was associated with every sort of evil. She saw the misery and dissension it had wrought with her mother and herself. It was the want of money that had soured Lady William's temper, and made her stoop to wrangle with her landladies

and cabmen, and to cheat her friends. It was that which made her lie, and flatter, and grumble, until she had scarcely an amiable quality left in her disposition.

It was this same want of money that compelled them to associate with people like the Stingos, who were so much beneath them in position : to submit to the insolence of the Macdougall, and to be put on a par with Selina Farthingale and her father. Regina felt all this keenly. Notwithstanding their poverty, she never forgot that she was the grand-daughter of the Duke of Mudford, and would have been married before now, if she had not considered that her birth should sell for a higher price in the matrimonial market than had yet been offered for it. Yet, if Sir Arthur Chasemore was not a rich man, he had, at all events, the power to take her away from all the surroundings she so much disliked, and to give her a

certain position as a baronet's wife. And then there was the chances of his discovering that his cousin was dead and of inheriting his grandfather's fortune. It was very puzzling to know what to do. As she entered the dingy little sitting-room, the windows of which looked as if they had not been cleaned for a year, and encountered her mother in a dirty cap and dressing-gown, trying to decipher the morning's news through her glasses, Regina shuddered. How she longed to get away from it all, by any means and with any one, so that she need never be subjected again to the discomfort she was enduring now!

Lady William glanced up scrutinisingly, as her daughter entered. She was not quite sure of the temper in which Regina had parted with her the night before.

'You don't look particularly tidy this morning,' she said, as her eye fell on a

crumpled muslin dress, with crumpled frills about the neck and sleeves.

‘I dare say not! But if so, I am only in keeping with the house. There is nothing particularly tidy about it, or, I might say, mamma, about yourself,’ replied Regina, as she drew a dish of cold bacon towards her and tried to get up an appetite for it.

‘Well! it is useless to wear out one’s best things in the morning, when there is no one to see them. But you will change your dress, of course, before Sir Arthur arrives?’

‘Yes; I suppose so.’

‘Have you decided in what words to reply to him in case he proposes to you?’

‘No.’

‘Really, Regina, you seem to me to fly in the face of Providence. I pointed out to you last night how essential it is not to dis-

miss this young man all at once, and how delicate a task you have before you, and yet you tell me this morning that you have not even thought what to say to him on the subject. The end of it will be that you will refuse him before you know what you are doing.'

'I don't think I shall!'

'You can never dream of *accepting* him, under the circumstances?' gasped Lady William, as her eyes and nose kept working violently with her unusual emotion.

'I don't think I shall,' repeated Regina.

'But you ought to be *sure*: you ought to have no thought upon the matter,' replied her mother. 'A beggarly baronet, who has not enough money to keep up his position, whilst his cousin, Mr. Chasemore, may be in London to-morrow with fifty thousand pounds in his pocket! You have no more idea of your own value than that table has!'

‘Look here, mamma, I don’t want to quarrel about this ; but I mean to do exactly as I choose. You are always holding up my value to me, but what has it brought as yet ? At four-and-twenty I am still living in these wretched lodgings with you—still in the market, in fact—and I am sick of it all.’

‘That is right ; abuse your mother, who has been doing her very best to get you married for the last six years. Is it my fault that you are still here ? See how I scrimp and save, to take you out in society, where you may be seen and appreciated ; and what has come of it ?—nothing.’

‘A great deal too much, in my opinion,’ interrupted Regina. ‘The acquaintance of such women as Mrs. Runnymede and Miss Farthingale, and obligations which we have not the power of returning : I hate the whole system of our life. Can you wonder I long to escape from it ?’

‘ This is gratitude ! Pray go on ; I shall not be at all surprised now to hear that you have decided on cutting society altogether, and subsisting henceforward on love in a cottage.’

‘ I should be very much surprised to hear it myself. I am too much your daughter for that. I have been brought up to believe in but one evil—poverty ; in but one good—wealth. I am not likely to forget the lesson now.’

‘ Yet you propose to marry Sir Arthur Chasemore ?’

‘ I never proposed it ; I only said I should do as I thought fit. I might have married before this, mamma, if it had not been for you. But you have always considered your own good rather than mine in the matter of a settlement for life. I don’t think that is fair. You have had your day, mine is to come. If I can enrich us both at the same time, well and good. If I can only relieve myself from

the burthen of poverty, you must not blame me for doing it.'

'Are you *in love* with this man?' demanded Lady William.

Miss Nettleship's face as she answered the question was a study.

'*In love!*' she repeated scornfully; 'why, I don't know what the words mean. I have been reared in poverty, and the frauds which to me seem inseparable from it; and I want to get into a purer atmosphere, where I shall not be compelled, for the sake of my dinner or the price of my cab, to call men and women my friends whom otherwise I should be ashamed to be associated with. That is what I think of when I speak of marriage. I have a tolerable face and figure, and I am the grand-daughter of a duke. To some men these are advantages, and in exchange for them I demand liberty and a competence. I am for sale, in fact, for a certain price, and

if I choose to lower it that is my business. Every merchant is allowed to cheapen his wares if he sees it is for his advantage to do so.'

'Oh, indeed!' replied Lady William, pettishly; 'that is all that you want, is it? Well, you should not find it difficult to suit yourself at that rate; and now, if you have finished your breakfast, I think you had better go and change your dress. You would be dear, even at a couple of hundreds a year, if you were caught looking such a figure of fun as you do now.'

Regina took her mother's hint and left the room. She really wanted to be alone for a few hours, and think over what was best to be done. Yet, when it was announced to her that afternoon that Sir Arthur Chasemore was waiting to see her in the drawing-room, she had come to no decision as to how their conversation would terminate. The young

baronet had seized the earliest opportunity to pay his call, and as he attended Miss Nettle-ship's pleasure, he presented a very fair picture of the average good-looking Englishman. He was of middle height and well built, with brown hair and eyes, and a beard and moustache of which he was known to be inordinately vain. He was dressed in the fashion also, for, notwithstanding Mrs. Farthingale's desire to make him out a very poor man, Sir Arthur had an income sufficient to keep himself as a gentleman and his wife as a lady, when he got her.

Notwithstanding these advantages, however, there was a hard look about the young man's expression when he was annoyed, which betokened ill for those who should offend him seriously. His was not a disposition to exercise the divine quality of forgiveness easily, though few of his ordinary acquaintances thought so. It is as difficult for society

to ascertain what a man *is*, as it is for the domestic circle to ignore what he is *not*. When a lover is courting, however, he appears in his happiest colours, and the smile with which Sir Arthur turned to greet Regina's entrance was sweetness itself. It even melted her for the moment, and made her think how much pleasanter it was to encounter than her mother's snappish questions or bitter sarcasm.

After a short conversation on the events of the preceding evening, during which Miss Nettleship rallied her visitor on his devotion to Selina Farthingale, Sir Arthur summoned up all his courage and dashed at once to the point.

‘Miss Nettleship—Regina! I am sure you must guess the motive which has brought me here to-day. You must have seen the feelings with which I have learned to regard you. You cannot have known me for so

many months without reading something of the inmost workings of my heart.'

'Really, Sir Arthur, I don't know what you are talking about!'

She said it so naturally, and with such a pretty air of mystification, that a bystander would have been trapped into believing she spoke the truth. And when she had finished the sentence she fixed her blue eyes inquiringly upon him, as though waiting for his explanation.

'Is it possible that you do not understand me—that you do not know that the hope of making you my wife has grown to be the greatest desire of my life?'

He had drawn nearer to her with the last words, and tried to take her hand. But she shrunk away from him.

'Your wife! Oh, Sir Arthur! you cannot think of what you are saying.'

'Cannot think of it! Why, I think of

nothing else by night and by day, and I should have spoken to you long ago, had my time not been so much occupied by all this law business. Besides, I wanted to find out exactly how I stood financially, before I asked for this dear hand.'

'Indeed, Sir Arthur, you do not know how little you are asking for. I am simply penniless. I have no marriage portion, and people cannot live upon nothing, you know.'

This she said in order that he might be led into stating exactly what his own income amounted to.

'I would not dream of dragging you down into poverty for my sake. I love you too well for that. But I have sufficient for us both, Regina. Part of my late grandfather's property was entailed, and he was compelled to leave it to his sons or their heirs; by which I, being an only child, came into my father's portion of five thousand pounds.

This, added to the proceeds of my profession, which I hope may increase, will yield us five or six hundred a year, on which I can at least keep you in the same position in which you have been brought up. It is not wealth, my dearest Regina, but it is not absolute beggary ; and if you love me as I love you, I am sure we shall be very happy together. What do you say to the prospect ?’

‘Sir Arthur ! you have taken me altogether by surprise. Whatever I may——’

‘Oh, pray go on !’

‘Whatever, I was going to say, I may have foolishly thought about you, I never believed you to be a marrying man ; and you have set my brain in a perfect whirl. I cannot give you an answer without a little reflection.’

‘I suppose it is hardly to be expected,’ he said, in a disappointed tone, ‘though I made sure you must have seen what was coming.’

But you can at least tell me if you love me, Regina.'

'That would be telling you everything,' she answered. 'That part of it requires more consideration than all the rest. Suppose we should make a mistake?'

'Don't think of it. Surely we are old enough to know our own minds? I am, at all events, for I was thirty last birthday, and no amount of consideration could alter my feelings with regard to you.'

'It is such an important step to take,' sighed Regina, as she played with the frills on her dress, and could not devise any means by which to put off answering the fatal question. Could she be contented on five or six hundred a year? she thought to herself. Did it mean maids of all work, dirty lodgings, and squalling children? She had not had much experience in trying how far money would go, but she was very much afraid it

did mean all that, in the future, if not now. And she shrank from the prospect. She could not sell herself so cheap. Sir Arthur attributed her silence to maidenly modesty, and tried to set her at ease again.

‘I have set my prospects before you in their worst light,’ he said presently. ‘There is another side to the question, though, as yet, an uncertain one. Have you ever heard my cousin Vivian Chasemore mentioned?’

‘Mr. Farthingale told us his story last evening.’

‘Ah! Farthingale is very sanguine about finding the poor boy again, but I fear he will be disappointed.’

‘Are you? *Why?*’

Regina could hardly help the suddenly awakened interest becoming evident in her voice, as she uttered these words:

‘Because—but this is a secret, remember, and I would tell it to no one but yourself. I

have received private intelligence this morning which leads me to believe too certainly in his death. Perhaps you do not know the difference this would make to me—may I say to *us*? Sir Peregrine left the bulk of his fortune, fifty thousand pounds, to my cousin Vivian. It ought to have gone with the title, you know; but he had the right of its disposal, and so I cannot complain. But if we receive the news of Vivian's death, or he still continues missing after three years, the money reverts to me. Of course, if the letter I have received can be verified, I shall come into it at once. But though it will procure a worthier case in which to shrine my jewel, I trust that no fortune could have the power to make any difference in your feelings towards me, Regina.'

'Oh no! of course not.'

Fifty thousand pounds within his very grasp! It was not likely the letter had been

written only to deceive him. How she wished he would confide to her from whom it had come. But she could not let him go under this uncertainty. At all hazards, she must chain him to her side.

‘You—you must be very anxious,’ she faltered; ‘but I am afraid the sad news will prove to be true. I thought it so strange, from the first, that if Mr. Vivian Chasemore were alive he should not have communicated with any of his friends for so long.’

‘So everybody says, but it did not do for me to be too sanguine. For the last two months the lawyers have been writing and advertising in every direction, without success. When I received the letter this morning, the description in which tallies in every respect with that of my poor cousin, I sent it at once to Farthingale, with orders to inquire into the matter. It will be a great blow to the little man’s vanity to find he is wrong

after all. He has been so certain that Vivian would turn up again.'

'Yes ; he said as much last evening. But no friend of yours, Sir Arthur, could wish the rumour of your cousin's death to prove untrue.'

'I care nothing for what my friends wish ; I only want to know what *you* will say upon the subject. Tell me, Regina, that whatever happens to me, I shall still have the comfort of your affection to fall back upon.'

He came round to the back of her chair, and leant over her. He would not take an undecided answer for the second time. Miss Nettleship felt she would have to say '*Yes*,' or '*No*,' now.

'Oh ! Sir Arthur ! cannot you guess ?' she murmured.

'I dare not. Too great a stake depends upon the issue. My ardent wishes might

lead me wrong. You must seal my fate with your own lips.'

'Will you not give me till to-morrow?'

'Not to say you love me. Your heart must tell you so much. Give me the assurance that I am not indifferent to you, and I will promise to wait patiently for that which must follow it.'

'Indeed, you are not indifferent to me then. Were it so, I could have answered your question at once. But when a woman's heart is concerned, you do not know the difficulty she finds in telling the truth.'

'Say no more, dearest. I understand it all. You have made me the happiest of men.'

At this juncture, the lodging-house servant abruptly opened the door to announce Mr. Farthingale, and Sir Arthur Chasemore had only just time to put a few feet of distance between himself and Miss Nettleship,

when the little man came flying into the room.

‘Eureka! Sir Arthur! I was told I should find you here. We have succeeded at last!’ he exclaimed, as he flourished his hat and umbrella over his head.

‘I was afraid you would find it to be true, Mr. Farthingale; but the news, though expected, is very shocking. When did the poor fellow die?’ asked the baronet, in a tone of proper sympathy.

‘Die! My dear Sir Arthur, he’s no more dead than you are! I’ve just been talking to him; that is to say, if you mean your cousin Vivian.’

‘What about the letter, then?’

‘Oh, that letter you sent me this morning? I’ve had no time to see after it, and it’s lucky I didn’t waste any on it. I found news waiting me from another quarter when I returned home last night, and I verified it the

first thing to-day. Your cousin, Mr. Vivian Chasemore, is as hearty as you are, Sir Arthur, and at my house at the present moment. Won't you come round and see him ?'



CHAPTER III.

‘I HATE THE SIGHT OF YOU.’

IN one of the smaller streets running at the back of Drury Lane stood the shop of old Mrs. Bell, the greengrocer, and everybody in those parts affirmed that it was ‘a perfect picture.’ The front of it was open, with a shelving board to display the fruit and vegetables; and when the carrots and turnips and fresh, crisp salads, and the onions and radishes and sea-kale were piled above each other on one side, and the apples and oranges, and bunches of grapes and baskets of filberts, were artistically grouped upon the other, to say

nothing of the strawberries and raspberries, and melons and figs that came and went in their season, you could not have found a more tempting little shop in the whole of Drury Lane.

Mrs. Bell, too, added to the picture, for she was a good old-fashioned country woman, who looked, in her spotless cap and apron, and her neat print dress, as if she ought to have been standing in a dairy in Devonshire, instead of a greengrocer's shop in a back slum of London. But, when young, she had followed the fortunes of a market-gardener, and been a faithful wife and friend to him until he died, with never more than a passing regret for the lanes and fields she had left behind her. She had lost her husband now for many years past, and her only son, and her daughter-in-law; and would have carried on the greengrocery trade all by herself, except for her granddaughter, Mary Bell, or

Bonnie Bell, as she was familiarly called by the neighbours, on account of her pretty face.

Old Mrs. Bell was wont to shake her head ominously whenever that pretty face was alluded to. It had not been inherited from her side of the family, and so she was instinctively opposed to it, and inclined to believe that it would come to no good. For Bonnie Bell's mother had been a little ballet girl from off the stage of Drury Lane Theatre, as good and innocent a woman as ever worked hard to prevent herself being a burthen on her friends, but still a great disappointment to Mrs. Bell, who had hoped to see her Joe bring home an honest housemaid or dairy-maid as his wife. Joe had possessed small eyes, a wide mouth, and flapping ears, being the 'moral,' as his mother affectionately said, 'of his own dear father;' consequently, when little Bonnie had made her appearance without the least

resemblance to Joe, Mrs. Bell had taken the child's likeness to the ex-ballet girl as a personal affront. Even though the poor young mother expiated her offence by dying, it was a long time before Bonnie had been accepted as a grandchild by Mrs. Bell ; but when both Joe and his father went the way of all flesh, the desolate woman's heart had turned to the only tie that was left her in this world, and had centred all its interests upon it since. Bonnie was very pretty, but she was very strange. A casual observer, seeing her stand in the doorway of her grandmother's shop, with her hands on her hips, and her eyes fixed on vacancy, would have thought she was not quite right in her mind. She was just eighteen, and had a supple, well-rounded figure of the middle height. Her complexion was delicate as a wild-rose leaf ; her light brown hair, which was thick, and soft, and short, was always in a ' fluffy ' condition ; her hands and

feet were shapely for her station in life. But the most curious feature about Bonnie Bell was the colour of her eyes : this was neither blue nor grey, but a sort of mauve tint, like the petals of a wood violet, and there was a far-away dreamy look about the eyes themselves, that gave the girl an ‘uncanny’ appearance. The superstitious thought she had the faculty of seeing spirits, but Bonnie Bell would have frightened herself to death over such a supposition. She knew she was absent, because her grandmother was always accusing her of ‘wandering ;’ but she would have experienced much difficulty in telling of what her dreams were composed, when she was not attending to her daily duties. She only knew that she disliked the dull street in which they lived, and longed to be a rich lady, and able to go to strange countries that she had seen before, and of which Mr. Waverley had sometimes spoken to her.

Mr. Alfred Waverley was Mrs. Bell's lodger, and to Bonnie fell, naturally, the greater share of waiting on him. There were some neat little rooms above the greengrocer's shop, and ever since the deaths of her husband and son, Mrs. Bell had been in the habit of letting two of them to a single man. After what has been written of her distaste to the profession of Bonnie's mother, it will sound surprising, perhaps, that she should have let her rooms to an actor. But 'beggars cannot be choosers,' as the old woman was fond of saying; and 'to have a "play-actor" sleeping in your spare bed, and to have him a-calling you "mother," is two very different things.' Besides, this 'play-actor' was very seldom at home, and was consequently little trouble. Mrs. Bell's first floor was let at a very moderate rental; and the young gentleman retained it for the purpose of keeping his books and the larger half of his wardrobe

there, whilst he travelled about the provinces in the pursuit of his profession. He often visited London, though. Whenever he had a spare day and found himself sufficiently near to render it worth while, he would burst into the greengrocer's shop and tear up to his rooms without any warning, bringing Mrs. Bell's 'heart into her mouth' with ordering ham and eggs and beefsteaks to be cooked just as she was sitting down to a comfortable cup of tea. Mr. Alfred Waverley, however, was a gentleman, and his landlady recognised the fact and served him all the better for it. He never swore an oath at her, nor took a liberty with Bonnie; and she was disposed to look with more lenient eyes on the whole dramatic profession for his sake.

'If they was only all like Mr. Waverley,' she would say, 'I should withdraw my opinion of the theater altogether.'

Mrs. Bell's customers did not, as a rule, lie

amongst the upper classes, but she was obliged to be all the more particular concerning the goods she vended on that account. The servants of the rich will buy anything, particularly when they get a percentage on all the stale vegetables consumed in their master's kitchen; but it is not an easy task to cheat the poor who market for themselves. Mrs. Bell's cabbages and carrots and turnips had to be of the freshest, or her customers rejected them with scorn. And no one supplied her better than Kit Masters, who took his cart into Covent Garden Market each morning, buying up the cheapest and best of everything, and had disposed of his whole stock-in-trade to the smaller green-grocers of the town before the afternoon.

Mrs. Bell always attended to the stocking of the shop herself. Bonnie was 'a deal too daft and dreamy' to be entrusted to choose fruit or purchase vegetables.

‘La, bless ye ! Kit Masters,’ she cried, on one of these mornings in June of which I write, as she appeared on the threshold of her domains, shading the sun from her eyes : ‘here’s a picture of fruit ! Well, I never did see sich strawberries ! Queen’s, aren’t they ? Why, each berry’s as perfect as my emery cushin. And is them figs you’ve got in a’ready ? Bless me ! they is early. But they won’t do for me, Kit. My customers can’t afford to look at ’em yet ; and them raspberries I got yesterday, I was obliged to let go at a dead loss. Why, they’d sunk half-way down the basket afore night. We must have another sack of them taters—King’s Regents—the same as afore. They’re real good ; I haven’t heard a complaint of ’em. Just hand me down a dozen bunches of wallflowers, and a few moss-roses, will ye ? Bonnie makes ’em up so neat for the button-hole. They seem to take wonderful with the gents of an evening.’

‘Aye, aye, missus; and how’s Bonnie?’ said Kit Masters.

‘She’s fairly, thank ye; mopes a bit, you know, but that was allays her way. She ain’t over and above strong.’

‘Ah! she ought to ’ave a good ’usband to see after ’er; that’s what Bonnie wants, in my opinion. Some one as could take ’er about a bit, as it might be in my cart, and let her see the world. I fancy it must be dull for a young gal, ’biding in this street all day.’

‘May be! I never found it dull, Kit Masters; but then I don’t come of a theater mother. That’s been the ruin of Bonnie, to my thinking. The blood will come out, you know, and she don’t seem to have a mind to settle down to anything.’

‘That’s nonsense, begging your pardon, Mrs. Bell. The gal will settle down fast enough, when she’s married. Could I be

speaking a word with you in the back parlour, now ?’

‘In course, Kit. Come in and have a glass of beer. You’re allays welcome, as I needn’t tell ye.’

The old woman withdrew into the back parlour, which was a tiny three-cornered room partitioned off from the shop, and Kit Masters, having given his horse the order to stand, followed her there and drank the glass of ale she proffered him.

‘Thank ye kindly, ma’am,’ he said, as he drew the cuff of his velveteen sleeve across his mouth. ‘And now what I wants to say to you is this. I never was a man of many words, and so you’ll excuse abruptness ; but I likes Bonnie, and I’ve a mind to marry her, if you says “Amen” to the banns.’

As he stood opposite to Mrs. Bell he seemed a man well-to-do enough, but terribly coarse, as a costermonger naturally would be.

He had not bad features, but they were overcast by a look of animalism that quite obliterated their beauty, and he evidently had not a soul above onions and potatoes. He was substantially dressed in corduroy trousers and velveteen coat and waistcoat, and he wore a crimson silk necktie and a rose in his button-hole. He had not shaved that morning, or perhaps the morning before; but, taken all in all, he was a very fair specimen of the sort of lover a greengrocer's granddaughter might hope to attract. Mrs. Bell did not appear at all overcome by the suddenness of Kit's announcement. Perhaps she had expected it. Perhaps it was not the first time that some one had come wooing after Bonnie Bell.

‘Well, Kit Masters,’ she replied, ‘I suppose you makes enough to keep her, and it’s not *I* as would raise an objection to the marriage; but Bonnie is not like other girls—there’s no denying she’s a bit queer in her thoughts and

ways, and I'm not over sure as she'd make you a good wife.'

'I'll take my chance of that,' replied the costermonger, with a look that said that he'd like to see the woman he couldn't master; 'so it needn't be no obstacle. As to my means, I never makes less than two pound a week, come rain or shine, and if that ain't enough to keep her like a lady, I don't know what is.'

'Lor'! it's ample, Kit Masters, and she may think herself lucky to get it. I wish I was sure of allays making half that money. I'd call myself a rich woman. But you've no shop to pay the rent on, that's where it is.'

'True for you, missus; but I keeps my horse and cart, you see, and Bonnie could have a ride with me every day of her life. She'd be gay enough spending her time riding about town, and seeing hacrobats and Punch and Judies and whatnot at every

corner. So, if you can settle the matter with her, well and good, and I'm ready as soon as she may be.'

'La, no, man! If there's to be any coortin' atween you, you must do it yourself. I can't undertake to do nothin' with Bonnie, for she's a queer-fangled one, as I said before, and has allays been minded to have her own way. But if you can bring her round to your thinking, I shan't make any bobbery about it.'

'But I never seem to have a chance of seeing her,' remarked Kit Masters, ruefully, as he scratched his head. 'I don't know if it's done a purpose; but she's never in the way when I come of a mornin'.'

'Well, that's my doin', and no one's fault 'cept her own. She's so main silly, I can't trust 'er to buy nothin' but it's sure to be wrong. So I sets her to work upstairs instead. However, you've got the orders

for this morning, so, if this affair ain't drove them out of your head again, I'll just step up and send her down to help carry 'em in with ye. So good-day, Kit Masters, and good luck to ye,' concluded Mrs. Bell, as she ascended to the upper story.

In a few minutes Bonnie appeared in the shop, ready to help Kit with the vegetables. She was looking very lovely that morning. The soft June air and gentle heat had sent a warmer flush into her cheeks, and her eyes were like a summer's sky, seen through the purple mist of a coming shower. She smiled pleasantly but vaguely at the amorous costermonger, as she stood in the open doorway with outstretched hands ready to receive the articles that should be handed down to her. But Kit was in too gallant a mood to permit Bonnie to do any hard work. If he placed a cabbage in her hands he followed her into the shop to see where she disposed of it, and

pressed up so closely against her as to extract a reprimand from her lips.

‘What are you shoving me for in that way, Kit Masters?’ she demanded sharply. ‘Can’t you keep your distance? I don’t want you to tell me where to place the things.’

‘But if I likes to do it, is there any harm, Bonnie?’

‘Yes; a deal, if you wants to know. The shop ain’t so big that there’s room for more than’s needed in it, so if you’ll keep outside, you will be doing me a service.’

‘Why do you speak so unkind to me, Bonnie?’

‘I don’t know what I says unkind. I’ve got my business to do, and you’ve got yours. Suppose we each sticks to our own.’

‘Ah! but I’ve got some business inside as p’r’aps you don’t guess on. Your grandmother do, though. She and I have been talkin’ it

over together, and she says if you're agreeable, so is she.'

'That's all right then; if you and grandmother gets on so well together, there's no need for nothin' more to be said on the matter. It don't concern me, whatever it is, that's certain.'

'But it *do* concern you, Bonnie, more than anybody, except myself.'

'Oh! do it? Well, just hand in them potatoes, will you? I've got my upstairs rooms to clean yet, and can't waste all my mornin' talking here to you.'

Kit scratched his head again with perplexity, as he noticed the girl's complete indifference to him, and wondered by what means he should make her listen to his suit. In another minute he staggered into the shop, under the burthen of a sack of potatoes.

'Well, they're main heavy,' he said, wiping his forehead with a bright cotton handker-

‘You my sweetheart!’ exclaimed the girl, reddening. ‘Get along! you don’t know what you’re talking on.’

‘But I do, and your grandmother knows it too, and she wants us to be sweethearts, Bonnie, and to be married into the bargain. Come now! What do you say to that?’

‘Us to be sweethearts!’ repeated Bonnie, contemptuously. ‘That would be a pretty muddle. Why, I hates the sight of you!’

‘Oh, you hates the sight of me, do you!’ cried Kit, becoming coarse as he became natural; ‘and you thinks our sweethearting would be a pretty muddle! You wants a lesson taught you, my beauty, and I’ll teach it you too, before you’re a minute older.’ And leaping over the little counter, Kit Masters seized Bonnie Bell in his rough embrace, and implanted several kisses on her blooming cheek.

If he had tried to murder her, she could

hardly have shrieked louder. She struggled violently to free herself from the hold of the costermonger, and as soon as she had gained the command of her hands she inflicted several hard blows—as hard as ever she could give them—upon his face with her open palm. The passers-by heard the noise, but thought nothing of it. The cries of drunken women, the screams of children, and the oaths of men were sounds too common in that back street to attract attention. If they had glanced into the open shop and seen a pretty girl struggling in the arms of a man, they would only have smiled to themselves and passed on. Kit Masters laughed at the impotency of the blows which were showered upon him, but his cheek burnt under the insult they conveyed nevertheless. Bonnie's hand was not a light one. She was no delicate nymph, this daughter of the people, although her appearance was more refined than that of the

generality of her class. But she screamed as if she had gone mad. Her purplish eyes turned black as a thunder-cloud with passion, and as soon as she was free she rushed from the shop and ran upstairs. The costermonger got into his cart and drove rapidly away. He did not care to make his discomfiture patent to the neighbourhood. And Bonnie was met at the head of the stairs by Mrs. Bell, who was all anxiety to learn the reason of the discord.

‘La, child! has a wops or any of them nasty insecks got among the fruit and stung ye? I declare you’ve give me sich a turn, I feel as if my insides was going round. Whatever on earth can be the matter?’

‘He kissed me, grandmother—that brute downstairs—he dared to kiss me!’ panted Bonnie, as she burst into a flood of tears.

‘La! and is that all? Well, I never! here’s a work about nothing! I thought at

the very least that you was badly hurted. Gals didn't make sich a fuss over a kiss when *I* was young. But I suppose the lad hadn't shaved this morning, and your ladyship's cheek is too delicate to bear the touch of his rough chin. La's me! what 'll ye come to?'

'He shan't do it again!' exclaimed Bonnie, with the exasperation of a little tigress, as she flew to the bedroom and dashed cold water over her face and head. 'Kit Masters had better try it on again with me—that's all. It's blood, and not water, I'll wash it out with next time. I hate him, and I'll kill him—I'll *kill* him if ever he dares lay a finger on me again!'

'I believe you're stark staring mad,' said her grandmother, angrily. 'The man's an honest man enough. If you don't want to marry him, there's no one to force you do it; but you needn't go on raving as if he'd tried to murder ye.'

‘It’s worse than murder, a deal,’ cried the girl, with her eyes still blazing. ‘I shouldn’t feel nothing of that when ’twas once over; but I don’t think my face will ever seem the same to me again, now he’s touched it.’

‘Lord ha’ mercy on us! You’re a born fool!’ said Mrs. Bell, as she turned away and went downstairs, out of all patience with her extraordinary grandchild.

Left to herself, all the passion faded out of Bonnie’s face, leaving it a deadly white instead. She halted for a minute when her grandmother had parted with her, gazing into vacancy.

‘I wonder if I *am* mad,’ she whispered, in a half-frightened voice. ‘I wonder if I shall go wild some day, all of a sudden, and bite grandmother and the rest of ’em. I don’t fancy as I shall, but I know what would drive me to it sooner than anything else, and that would be biding along of Kit Masters. But

it feels bad to be as I've been—very, very bad; and it makes me cold, too, just as if the sun had gone in and the rain was a-coming.'

She shivered slightly as she spoke, and passing into the next room, which belonged to their lodger, resumed the work of sweeping and dusting, in which she had been interrupted. It was a very plainly furnished little apartment, but neat and clean. The white-washed walls were decorated with a lot of prints cut from the illustrated papers, which Alfred Waverley had coloured and stuck there himself. There was a considerable amount of artistic taste shown in the arrangement of the subjects, which, in Bonnie's eyes, formed a regular picture gallery. There were representations of Roman and Spanish fruit and water-carriers, of foreign landscapes, of balls given at the Queen's palace, of races, and royal weddings, and all sorts of wonderful things that Bonnie had only dreamt of.

But she seemed to know all about them from the pictures, before which she had so often stood with Mr. Waverley, whilst he attempted to describe the scenes they depicted to her. She was accustomed to stand before those same pictures in his absence, and repeat to herself what he had said concerning them, like a little child conning over its lesson, until her grandmother told her to 'leave off that muttering' and take her part in the domestic duties of the house.

In one corner of the lodger's room stood an old portmanteau, which had evidently been an expensive article when new, though it had done good service by that time. There had been initials or a name stamped into the leathern cover, but the letters had been cut away with a penknife, leaving an unsightly blemish. An iron-bedstead, washing-stand, and chest of drawers, completed the furniture of the apartment. They were all as bright

as elbow-grease could make them, yet Bonnie kept rubbing them mechanically with the duster she held in her hand, as if her thoughts had travelled far away from her grandmother's first floor. Once, as she had dusted the old portmanteau for about the twentieth time, she stooped and kissed its ugly, hard, disfigured leathern lid. She was creeping round the room again in her vague uncertain manner, when a sharp call from below sent the rich blood mantling to her cheek. Bonnie had awakened from her dream. The duster dropped from her hand, and she moved rapidly to the head of the staircase.

‘Do you want me, grandmother?’

‘In course I wants you! What else should I call your name for? Here, come down quick! there's a gentleman waiting to speak to you.’



CHAPTER IV.

‘YOU ARE A RICH MAN, MR. VIVIAN.’

‘A GENTLEMAN waiting to speak to her !’

Could it be Mr. Waverley, who had returned unexpectedly, as he so frequently did? In another moment Bonnie’s apron was off, her cotton sleeves were unrolled to her wrists, and she had descended to the level of the shop. But the visitor who waited her there was not Alfred Waverley : he was a complete stranger, and he had evidently come on some business unconnected with their trade, as her grandmother had given him a seat in the back parlour.

‘Bonnie,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bell, as soon as the girl made her appearance, ‘do you know when Mr. Waverley will be ’ome again?’

‘I—,’stammered Bonnie; ‘how should I tell, grandmother? You know how he comes and goes, just for all the world like lightning.’

‘I suppose that this young lady,’ observed the stranger, deferentially, ‘sees a good deal of the young gentleman in question?’

He was a foxy little man in appearance, with the eye of a hawk, and the nose of a weasel, and a general look of extreme cunning about him. He was, in fact, the lawyer, Mr. Rufus Farthingale.

‘Well, sir,’ replied Mrs. Bell, apologetically, ‘you see she waits on his rooms, and so forth. I’m not so young as I was, sir. I’ve buried my husband for fifteen years, and I begin to feel the stairs terrible. Indeed, if it wasn’t for Mary here, who’s my granddaughter, I

couldn't stand the trouble and fatigue of a lodger ; but she carries up his trays and makes his bed, and, naterally, sees and hears more of him than I do.'

' Exactly, I quite understand ; and so perhaps Miss Mary will be able to afford us the clue that we require.'

Bonnie glanced at Mrs. Bell with an air of complete bewilderment. She did not understand what Mr. Farthingale was talking about.

' Speak up !' cried her grandmother, sharply.

' What am I to say ?' she uttered, with her most absent look and manner.

' La bless me ! I've no patience with you. Why, you're to answer this gentleman's questions, to be sure.'

' I have reason to believe,' commenced the lawyer, ' that your lodger is staying here under an assumed name, and I want you to tell me

all you can about him. Tell me everything you can think of, never mind how trivial: the smallest circumstances are sometimes of importance. For instance, how long has he been away this time ?

‘Is it anything to hurt him ?’ demanded Bonnie, slowly.

‘Bless the gal ! do this gentleman look like a murderer ?’ cried Mrs. Bell, who had already been promised a handsome bonus by Mr. Farthingale, if she would aid him in his search. ‘But I can answer for that question, sir. Mr. Waverley’s bin away from London now nigh upon seven weeks.’

‘’Twill be eight weeks to-morrow,’ interrupted Bonnie, eagerly.

‘This young lady has an excellent memory,’ observed the lawyer. ‘Did he tell you where he was going, Miss Mary ?’

‘No, sir ; but I can guess where he is.’

‘Will you have the goodness to tell me, then ?’

‘If you’ll tell me your business with ‘im.’

At this show of independence on Bonnie’s part, Mrs. Bell was properly indignant.

‘Well, I never ! where’s your manners ? Is that the way to speak to a rale gentleman ? Take them hands of yours out of your pockets, Bonnie, and answer as you’re told.’ And then she continued in a lower key, ‘You must please to excuse ‘er, sir, for she’s not over strong in her head, poor thing !’

‘I’m strong enough to keep my mouth shut till I hear why I am to open it,’ replied Bonnie, stoutly.

‘But I am quite ready to satisfy your curiosity,’ said Mr. Farthingale ; ‘you’ve no need of suspicion, I can assure you. I have very good news for Mr. Waverley, should he prove to be the gentleman I believe him to

be ; and the greatest kindness his friends can do him, is to give me every information where he can be found.'

'Good news is it, sir?' said Bonnie. 'Then he's sure to be round again to hear it for himself before long. I know nothing about where he's gone to.'

'Why, Bonnie!' exclaimed her grandmother, 'I remember your telling me the name of the place the very day Mr. Waverley left us, only it's gone out of my head. And didn't you send his clean collars arter 'im in a parcel? You *must* know where he's gone to.'

The lawyer thought to himself, 'Either this girl is ignorant, or she is obstinate.' He looked in her face and decided it was the latter.

'Perhaps Miss Mary will be able to remember if we give her time,' he said.

'No! I can't remember nothing about it.'

It's gone clean out of my head, like it has out of grandmother's.'

'Well, well! don't trouble yourself on the matter,' replied the lawyer, with professional policy. 'If Mr. Waverley is the person I take him to be, he will be only too glad to send me his own address, as soon as his friends let him know I require it. Can you describe him to me?'

'Oh! he's beautiful!' cried Bonnie, eagerly. 'His 'air's as black as night, and so be his eyes a'most; and he's got very slim feet and 'ands, and a soft skin without any 'air on it, and his teeth is as white as milk, and——'

' 'Art alive!' exclaimed Mrs. Bell, who had been listening with an open mouth to this tirade, 'I never thought 'im 'alf as 'andsome as that! If you'd asked *me*, sir, I should have said 'e was a personable young man enough, with dark eyes and 'air, and a genteel figger—but that's all.'

‘Ah ! ladies’ opinions often differ on such subjects, but your information is equally valuable. And now, Miss Mary,’ continued the lawyer, after having made sundry notes in his pocket-book, ‘as you have the care of Mr. Waverley’s rooms, can you allow me to look round them for a moment ?’

‘Grandmother,’ said Bonnie, seriously, ‘them rooms is in our charge, you know, and I can’t see as we’ve the right of showing ’em to strangers.’

‘Why, it can’t ’urt ’em for the gentleman jist to walk round. He won’t touch nothing.’

‘You may take my word for it, I will not ; in fact, I should wish you both to accompany me whilst I make my tour of inspection.’

‘Nothing can be fairer than that,’ quoth Mrs. Bell, as she preceded the visitor and her granddaughter up the stairs.

The bedroom was entered first. There was positively nothing to look at there, except

the old portmanteau, which Mr. Farthingale examined carefully, but was quite unsuccessful in his attempt to decipher what initials had originally been stamped upon it.

The sitting-room seemed equally void of any proofs of the identity of its owner. Every article of consequence had been carefully stowed away in the cupboards when Mr. Waverley left them, and even the importance of his search could not have justified the lawyer in breaking the sanctity of lock and key.

‘Them be his books,’ said Mrs. Bell, with an air of contempt, as she pointed to a pile of those small pamphlets stitched in fawn and blue coloured wrappers which are so familiar to theatrical eyes. ‘You know, perhaps, sir, that the poor young gentleman is nothing but a play-actor, and I hope you won’t think the worse of me and Mary for letting the rooms to ’im; but I’ve allays

thought somehow as he'd bin misfortunate in his anteriors, and it has never bin my plan to be 'ard on them as has come down in their living.'

'It does you honour, madam,' replied Mr. Farthingale, as he opened the fly-leaf of each play-book successively. But no name met his eye except that of Alfred Waverley. It was evident that if the young man were living under an assumed title he was determined to keep it.

'Well! I am really much obliged to you for the trouble you've taken, but I can't make out anything from all this,' he said at last, as he slipped something into Mrs. Bell's hand, and turned to quit the room. 'Hullo! what's that?'

He was pointing to a very indistinct and badly-executed photograph of a statue of Psyche, that was stuck carelessly in the frame of a common engraving.

‘You mustn’t touch that, sir!’ exclaimed Bonnie, with needless caution.

‘Oh! it belongs to Mr. Alfred Waverley, then? Did he bring it here with him?’

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the old woman, ‘and he’s got a lot more of faces, and sich like, locked away in his portmanteau.’

‘Ah, indeed!—I’d swear that’s a specimen of the old general’s bad photography,’ said Mr. Farthingale to himself, as he examined the faded picture; ‘and if I’m not greatly mistaken, that cast of Psyche stood on the landing in their house in Portman Square. I believe my unknown informant is correct, and that I’ve hit the right nail on the head at last.—Perhaps you’ve thought of the place where Mr. Waverley went by this time?’ he continued to Bonnie.

‘No, I haven’t!’ returned the girl, almost sullenly.

The lawyer exchanged glances of intelligence with Mrs. Bell.

‘Try and get it out of her,’ he whispered, ‘and I’ll look in again this afternoon to hear if you’ve succeeded.’

He gave the loose money in his waistcoat pocket a significant rattle as he concluded, and bidding the two women ‘Good-morning,’ hastily left them to themselves.

‘Well, of all the obstinacy I ever see or heard of,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bell, as soon as he was gone, ‘this beats it. Bonnie! I’m as sure you know the name of that place as that I sit here; but shaking wouldn’t get it out of you if you’re so inclined. Why couldn’t you give the gentleman a straight answer? It’s the loss of sovereigns to me.’

‘*Sovereigns!*’ cried the girl, contemptuously, ‘what’s sovereigns compared to his safety? How do you know what that foxy-faced old rat wanted of Mr. Waverley?’

P'r'aps he meant to put him in prison. How would you feel then if I'd given up the name of the place he's hiding in ?

'Nonsense ! Didn't ye hear 'im say 'twas good news he'd got for 'im.'

'I must do more than *hear* before I betrays 'im. Is it likely an old fellow like that would come sniffing about these rooms for any good ?'

'I can't say, but if Mr. Waverley does owe money, he should pay it, that's all. I've allays bin honest myself, and I don't 'old with folks as isn't.'

'Who dares to say 'e isn't honest ?' cried Bonnie, flaring up in defence of the absent.

'La ! you've no call to fly at me in that fashin. You was the first to think this gentleman had come to take 'im up. But my opinion's this, that if Mr. Waverley is the gentleman we takes 'im to be——'

'What then ?' demanded a joyous voice

from the landing, and in another moment Alfred Waverley himself, carrying a little black bag in his hand, burst into the room and confronted them.

Mrs. Bell, not knowing how much of her conversation concerning him had been overheard, gave a little shriek of surprise and consternation at his unexpected appearance ; but Bonnie turned as white as a sheet, and trembled violently all over.

‘Talk of an angel, you see, Mrs. Bell, and you’re sure to hear the rustling of his wings,’ exclaimed the lodger, as he threw down his bag and umbrella, and divested himself of his dust-coat.

He was a very handsome man, and possessed a face full of varying expression and passionate energy. His dark hair was brushed back off a broad forehead, in which the anterior lobes were well developed ; his dark-grey eyes were fringed with black lashes ;

and a small moustache, which had evidently not long been permitted to grow, shaded his upper lip. He looked like a man whose feelings would be quickly and powerfully excited, and might as suddenly fade away.

He was glowing as a southern sky without the ever-present sun hid behind the clouds, for the lines of his mouth betrayed a determination which went far to neutralise the softness of his eyes.

‘ Bless me ! Mr. Waverley ! you ’ave took us of a suddent this time. Wherever ’ave you sprung from, sir ?’

‘ Why, Birmingham, to be sure. My time was up there yesterday, and I go to Swansea on Monday. Bonnie knew my address.’

‘ There now ! I said as much,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bell, shaking her finger at Bonnie. ‘ Oh, you obstinate little creetur !’

‘ What has Bonnie been obstinate about ?’ demanded Alfred Waverley, looking kindly

at the girl. 'Bonnie, you haven't said "*how d'ye do?*" to me yet,' he continued, as he offered her his hand.

The one she gave him in return was cold as death.

'I hope there's nothing wrong!' said the young man, as he looked from Mrs. Bell to her granddaughter.

'No, sir, nothing to speak of; only there's bin a gennelman here this morning askin' arter you, and wanting your address, and nothing on earth would make this gal give up the place you was a-stoppin' at.'

'Oh, that's a mistake, Bonnie! You must always let people know where I am staying. It might be a manager, you know, who wanted to give me work.'

'This wasn't a manager,' replied Bonnie, shaking her head. 'He was a nasty-lookin' chap—summat in the law, I fancy—and I was afraid he might take your goods, sir, or do some malice of that sort.'

Alfred Waverley burst out laughing.

‘He wouldn’t find much to satisfy him here, Bonnie. A couple of dozen old play-books, and a portmanteau full of worn-out linen. But you needn’t be afraid another time. I don’t owe a man a shilling, and no one would come asking for me here who wasn’t my friend.’

‘That’s just what the gentleman said, sir,’ interposed Mrs. Bell, eagerly; ‘and ’e’s got the very best of news for ye—summat that’s very good indeed—and ’e said as soon as ever you ’eard who ’e was, you’d send your address immediate, and be glad to.’

‘Good news for me,’ repeated Alfred Waverley, gravely. ‘What on earth can he mean? How did he ask for me?’

‘He walked into the shop, jist like any other mortal, sir, and asked downright for Mr. Halfred Waverley. And as ’e couldn’t get your address out of this gal, ’e said ’e’d

look in agen by-and-by to see if I had called it to mind myself.'

'Oh, very good,' said her lodger, looking relieved at her statement. 'I shall be very glad to see the gentleman when he calls again; but unless he's a manager, or one of my old pals, I can't imagine what he can want with me. And now, my good Mrs. Bell, will you send me up a chop, or some bread and cheese, or anything you've got in the house? for I'm starving.'

'Bonnie, you cut over to the butcher's, and get a chop for Mr. Waverley, and then lay his cloth as quick as you can, while I cooks it.'

Bonnie did not require a second bidding. The finest chop in the butcher's shop was frizzling on the gridiron in another five minutes, and she was demurely preparing the table in the lodger's room for its reception.

‘Bonnie,’ said Alfred Waverley, ‘why were you so afraid to give that gentleman my address in Birmingham?’

‘Just why I told you, sir. I thought you might owe somebody a few shillings, p’r’aps; and I wasn’t going to be the one to set a lot of thieves on your track.’

‘Thank you, my dear little girl. It was a very kind and friendly thought; but you needn’t have been afraid. As I said before, I have no debts, and fear no man. I am rather curious, though, to hear what this gentleman can want with me.’

‘He opened all your books, and read your name,’ said Bonnie, in an aggrieved tone; ‘and he said ’twasn’t your own, and he believe you’d got another.’

‘*What!*’ exclaimed Alfred Waverley, starting from his chair.

‘Another name, sir, beside Waverley. I knew ’twas nonsense, though play-actors do

'ave two names sometimes, I've 'eard grandmother say.'

'Yes, yes; of course it's all nonsense,' replied the lodger, reseating himself. 'However, if the gentleman returns, I should like to speak to him. How beautifully clean you have kept my rooms whilst I have been away, Bonnie! It seems a long time since I was here last, doesn't it?'

'Terrible long,' acquiesced the girl, in a low voice.

'I've been making a lot of friends in Birmingham, and a lot of money into the bargain.'

'I'm very glad of that, sir.'

'Yes; I don't know when I've been so successful in my profession before. They want me to go back there as soon as I've finished my engagement at Swansea. But I'd rather get something to do at old Drury Lane. I miss London life very much, Bonnie ;

and I miss you into the bargain. I've never found such another "neat-handed little Phillis" to keep my rooms tidy and chat to me all the time I'm taking my meals. The girl who waited on me at Birmingham was so ugly, I never rang the bell except I was absolutely obliged.'

Bonnie laughed softly to herself at this announcement.

'And how have you been getting on in my absence?' continued Mr. Waverley; 'got any new lovers, Bonnie, eh?'

'*Lovers!*' repeated the girl; 'I never have none—I don't care for 'em.'

'Oh, now, Bonnie, that's a story. You know Kit Masters is awfully sweet upon you. He used to bring you flowers every day this spring. Haven't you made up your mind to marry him yet?'

Bonnie's face paled and flushed alternately with emotion, and Alfred Waverley went on

teasing her, until he saw her eyes were full of tears.

‘Why, what’s up now, child? You’re surely not going to cry over a harmless joke. If you don’t marry Kit Masters, it will be somebody else, you know. You’re a great deal too pretty, Bonnie, to go without a husband.’

‘But I will,’ said Bonnie, through her tears. ‘I hate ’em all; I don’t want none of ’em: I mean to bide as I am.’

‘Oh, you little vixen!’ exclaimed Waverley, laughing, as she ran downstairs to fetch his mutton-chop.

He was still sitting over the luncheon-tray, ruminating what he should do with himself that evening, and wondering what business the visitor of the morning could possibly have to transact with him, when he was told that the same gentleman had returned, and was waiting below.

‘Show him up,’ said Waverley, and the next minute the lawyer stood upon the threshold.

‘I am fortunate, sir,’ he commenced, but as soon as he caught sight of the young man’s face, he changed his tone.

‘Good heavens!’ he exclaimed, ‘it is as I thought, and you are Vivian Chasemore.’

‘Mr. Farthingale,’ said the other, ‘however did you trace me here?’

‘I will tell you in a minute. We have been looking for you for the last two months. Meanwhile I hope you will shake hands with me.’

‘With pleasure,’ returned Vivian; ‘I have no grudge against you, Mr. Farthingale; but if you come here with any intent to try and persuade me to retake my place in society, I forewarn you it will be useless. Had I ever contemplated such a step, my father’s death would have put an end to it. There is no

motive now to induce me to alter my way of living. I have chosen my path in life, and I mean to stick to it.'

'Just so, Mr. Chasemore ; and I bring you news that will render you more independent still. There is no need now, sir, that you should follow anything but your own fancy for the future.'

'I don't understand you, Mr. Farthingale.'

'You are a rich man, Mr. Vivian.'

'A rich man ?'

'I mean what I say. You doubtless learnt from the newspapers, two months ago, of the death of your grandfather, Sir Peregrine Chasemore.'

'I did ; but my father sold the reversionary interest of his small expectations from that quarter in favour of his widow ; so I knew there could be nothing for me.'

'On the contrary, there is everything. By your grandfather's will you inherit the whole

of his private fortune — *fifty thousand pounds!*

Vivian Chasemore looked bewildered.

‘Fifty thousand pounds! Are you making a fool of me, Mr. Farthingale?’

‘I am telling you the bare truth, sir.’

‘Then what becomes of my cousin Arthur?’

‘He took nothing but his father’s original portion of five thousand pounds.’

‘Is that just?’

‘It was Sir Peregrine’s will, Mr. Chasemore. And now, how soon will you take possession of your property?’

‘Give me one moment to gain my breath again. *Fifty thousand pounds!* It seems incredible. I feel like a Cræsus! Whatever made my old grand-dad think of me after that fashion?’

‘He names you in his will as his favourite grandchild, and I suppose that is sufficient

reason for the bequest. But come now, Mr. Vivian, you must not remain here !'

'Where am I to go ?'

'Come home with me—at least for to-night. I will try and get your cousin Sir Arthur to meet you at dinner, and my daughter will be delighted to receive you. This will give you time to think over your prospects, and you can settle up everything here to-morrow. Will you come ?'

'I will,' said Vivian Chasemore.



CHAPTER V.

‘KEEP HER IN THE DARK.’

As soon as Mr. Farthingale had safely deposited Vivian Chasemore in the care of the delighted Selina, he flew round to communicate the news of his success to Sir Arthur, and not finding him at his chambers, was directed by his housekeeper to Lady William's apartments, where, as I have already related, he interrupted a very interesting conversation between the object of his search and Regina Nettlehip. When Mr. Farthingale plumply asked the baronet 'to go round with him at once and welcome his cousin, Sir Arthur did

not well see how he could refuse the request. To have shown any unwillingness in the matter, would have looked like disappointment at Vivian's return, so he was fain to comply. The presence of Mr. Farthingale prevented his doing more than bid Regina a formal farewell, though he looked unutterable things in doing so, which she pretended not to see, for the intelligence that the lawyer had brought them had fallen on her like a sudden blow.

‘I will certainly accompany you to see my cousin Vivian,’ said Sir Arthur to Mr. Farthingale, ‘and you must relate to me the whole story of his recovery on our way. I cannot tell you the relief I feel at hearing of his safety. I had almost made up my mind that he was dead.’

‘And you will dine with us?’ asked the little lawyer, eagerly.

‘With pleasure! Miss Nettleship,’ he

continued to Regina, 'I have to leave you very hurriedly, but the cause admits of no delay. I trust I shall see you to-morrow.'

But Regina had already lost her interest in seeing him. She required time for consideration, and invented an engagement on the spot.

'Not to-morrow, Sir Arthur. Mamma and I are engaged out for the whole day.'

'Indeed! I *am* sorry! The next day, then?'

'I am not sure of what mamma may have arranged for us even then, but should we be at home we shall be most happy to receive you; and your cousin Vivian also, if you like to bring him,' she added politely.

'Many thanks. I cannot answer for Vivian, but I certainly can for myself. And now, Mr. Farthingale, I am at your service.'

As they drove to the lawyer's house, Sir Arthur heard the whole history that is already

known to the reader ; and when they arrived there, they found Vivian Chasemore alone in the drawing-room, Miss Selina having slipped away to adorn herself in her most 'killing' dress for the coming dinner. The cousins, who had not seen each other for five years, had never been intimate friends, and there was a stiffness, evidently felt on both sides, in the way they greeted each other, that made Mr. Farthingale decide the best thing he could do was to leave them alone for a little while in order to conquer it.

'This is a most agreeable surprise, Vivian,' were the first words Sir Arthur said after their host had quitted the room. 'From your long absence and complete silence, we were almost afraid there was no chance of your turning up again.'

'An agreeable surprise, do you call it ? I should have thought it would have been quite the contrary to you,' laughed his cousin.

‘Now, do you mean that for politeness, Arthur, or is it your real sentiment? Because I’m an actor, you know, and used to call a spade a spade; and I would rather hear you say outright that my coming back is a great disappointment to you, than that you should carry the burden of a falsehood on your soul for my sake.’

‘Yes; we heard that you had been really compelled to—to—adopt the stage as a means of support,’ replied Sir Arthur, evading any answer to the question put to him. ‘What an immense change our grandfather’s eccentric will has wrought for you!’

‘I have to see yet whether it will be for the better,’ said Vivian; ‘I have grown to love the profession, and am not sure whether I shall be contented to live a lazy life and eat the bread of idleness. I have an engagement at Swansea to commence next Monday, and if I cannot get a substitute, I shall fulfil it.’

‘What an extraordinary taste!’ ejaculated Sir Arthur; ‘this is scarcely what Sir Peregrine intended in leaving you the heir to his whole private fortune.’

‘I can’t help it. I never asked him to leave me so, nor old Farthingale to look me up. How he found me at last, I cannot say, for I hardly ever read a paper, and as the advertisements only mentioned me by my own name, none of my friends would have recognised they were intended for me.’

‘You have kept our name a secret then, I am thankful to understand.’

‘Strictly so! I have gone by that of Alfred Waverley ever since I left home.’

‘Vivian! why did you leave it?’

‘Because of that abominable woman my father was fool enough to marry. No one could live in the same house with her. She was a standing disgrace, and set him against me into the bargain. Is she alive still?’

‘Yes, as you will be able to judge for yourself before long. She is sure to find you out, now that you have come home, in hopes of sharing your good fortune.’

‘Then she will be disappointed. I’d sooner throw my money in the gutter. I say, Arthur, whatever made the grand-dad leave it to me?’

‘Who can tell?’ rejoined Sir Arthur, pettishly. ‘It’s not worth discussing. I suppose the old man was in his dotage. It’s yours, and that’s enough.’

‘Of course you came into something.’

‘Only my father’s portion of the marriage settlement.’

‘Are you married, Arthur?’

‘No; but likely to be.’

‘I congratulate you.’

‘I conclude you’ll be marrying yourself, now that you can do it so comfortably.’

‘Not I, my dear fellow!’ laughed Vivian;

‘I’ve enjoyed my liberty too long and too much, to sell it so soon. What on earth should I marry for? To keep one horse instead of two, and live in the same house all the year round, instead of knocking about the world and seeing all that there is to be seen. No, no, Arthur! Now I’ve got my money I mean to spend it on my own pleasure, and not on the support of a lot of squalling brats. It’s the greatest mistake a man with money can make to marry young. He might as well be a pauper at once. I think if I had remained in the profession I might have looked out for some nice little girl to keep my supper hot for me of an evening, for it’s lonely work to go home to an empty lodging. But not now that I’ve sufficient means to entertain as much company as I choose. I mean to keep a jolly set of chambers in town, and run over to the Continent whenever I feel inclined, and leave the matrimony to you. And who knows

whether you may not come into this grand fortune after all, old boy ?

‘What do you mean by that ?’

‘Why, that if I understand old Farthingale rightly, the money is left to me, and to my eldest son, or grandson, as the case may be ; and if I die without an heir, it returns to you, or yours. So that all you have to do is to outlive me.’

‘What nonsense, Vivian ! Half the girls in town will be after you as soon as your return has been duly advertised amongst them !’

‘It will make no difference to you, Arthur. Once for all, I am not a marrying man !’

At this juncture Mr. and Miss Farthingale re-entered the room : the young lady radiant in a blue dress, which had been donned expressly with the view of fascinating the baronet. Of course she would have been ready enough to take Vivian and

his fifty thousand pounds, had there been any chance of it; but Miss Selina knew better than that. The young man who has just come into his property is fastidious. The young man who has just lost his, is the very subject to accept consolation in the shape of an heiress. So the Farthingales considered, and they were wise in their generation.

The dinner passed pleasantly enough. Vivian Chasemore was in the highest spirits, and kept them all alive with his fund of anecdotes. In the course of conversation, Miss Farthingale, wishing to pay him a compliment, remarked 'that she never should have taken him for an actor;' and Sir Arthur capped her observation.

'Do I look too great a fool?' cried Vivian, comically.

They both hastened to assure him that was not the reason.

‘Ah, I know what you mean! You expected to see me in a light coat and a scarlet necktie, with hair down to the nape of my neck, and to hear me ignore my H’s, and talk with a nasal twang. Is that it?’

Sir Arthur hummed and hawed, and did not appear ready to answer the question, and Miss Selina said, with modest downcast eyes, that certainly *some* professional gentlemen whom she had accidentally met were not a bit like Mr. Vivian Chasemore.

‘Because they were not gentlemen from the beginning,’ he argued. ‘It’s not the profession that makes the man, but the man the profession. Had I been reduced to taking service as a grocer’s help and sweeping out the shop, I only hope I should have swept it out a great deal better than an ordinary boy would have done.’

‘Oh, Mr. Chasemore, you are so funny!’ cried Miss Selina.

‘I only say what I feel, Miss Farthingale. There are plenty of well-bred and educated men upon the stage who retain the manners in which they were reared. There are also plenty of the other sort. But, you see, I have come forth untainted from the ordeal, and trust I shall still be found fit to retake my proper place in society.’

‘Who could doubt it, Mr. Chasemore?’ replied the old lawyer, gaily. ‘I hope you mean to honour us by staying here as long as it may be convenient to yourself, sir.’

‘Thanks! I will accept your offer of a bed for to-night, but to-morrow I must return to my own lodgings, if only for a few hours. I have left those two poor women in a state of the greatest bewilderment. All they know is that some mysterious personage has spirited me away from them; but they have little idea it is for ever.’

‘Who are the women you allude to?’ asked Miss Farthingale.

‘My old landlady, Mrs. Bell, and her granddaughter Bonnie. Such a pretty girl! is she not, Mr. Farthingale?’

‘Yes; indeed, from the little I saw of her, she appeared to me a very handsome young woman, and particularly devoted to your interests.’

They all laughed at him, but Vivian was not to be laughed out of countenance.

‘So she is, and always has been. I’ve lodged in her grandmother’s house whenever I’ve been in London, for more than three years past, so Bonnie and I are old friends. She was quite a child when I first went there.’

‘What a curious name Bonnie is!’

‘It is a nickname given her by the neighbours, on account of her pretty face. And she’s as good as she’s pretty. She’s the best

little girl in the world,' said Vivian, emphatically.

Miss Selina tittered and shrugged her shoulders. She thought she sniffed a *mésalliance* in the wind. Sir Arthur sighed, and reflected what a much better use he could have made of the fifty thousand pounds. Mr. Farthingale caught the sigh, and chuckled over it. He had not quite so large a fortune to bestow upon his daughter as Sir Peregrine had left to Vivian, but there was sufficient money lying at his bank to form a very effectual salve for the baronet's disappointed hopes.

When Sir Arthur had taken his departure, and Vivian Chasemore had retired for the night, the lawyer followed his daughter into her private sitting-room to discuss the day's proceedings.

'What do you think of that young Chasemore, Selina?'

‘He seems very wild, papa. He will soon make ducks and drakes of his fifty thousand pounds!’

‘So I think. However, he has no head for business, and as the money is safely in my hands now, I may be able to persuade him to leave it so. If he *will* throw it away——’

‘Some of it may as well drift into our coffers as into those of less worthy people. I quite agree with you.’

‘Sharp girl!’ responded Mr. Farthingale, patting her head. ‘But if so, it will only find its way eventually back to its original source,—eh, Selina? I fancy you would have no more objection to be “my lady,” than I should to see you so!’

‘Wait till I am asked, papa.’

‘No, my dear, that is not like your usual good sense! Gentlemen often want to have their eyes opened on these little matters.

For aught I know to the contrary, Sir Arthur is not even aware that I am prepared to make a settlement upon you. And it would be an immense help to him. In fact, I don't see how he is to keep up his title without it. His present position is nothing short of beggary.'

'Well, I can't say I should have any objection to get Sir Arthur over Regina Nettleship's head. She's been angling her very best for him, the last three months.'

'Miss Nettleship! Nonsense! Why, she has not a penny. My dear, I tell you Sir Arthur cannot afford to marry on his present income. He has not the wherewithal even to furnish a house.'

'And you'd do all that for us, papa?'

'To be sure I would. And give you a clear thousand a year to start with into the bargain.'

Miss Farthingale's eyes sparkled. She

thought it quite impossible that the baronet could be proof against such an array of temptations.

‘By the way, my dear,’ continued the lawyer, ‘I have some news for you. Mrs. Mathers is dead, and her niece Janet Oppenheim is without a home. I have been obliged to ask her here.’

‘*Here!*’ exclaimed Miss Selina; ‘not for long, I hope. You know how I hate girls.’

‘I don’t think you’ll dislike Miss Oppenheim. She seems a quiet inoffensive sort of creature. But the period of her stay here is indefinite. The fact is, Selina, I have had the charge of the old woman’s property for years past, and her death was so sudden that I must have time to pull myself together a bit, before I can hand over what is due to the niece.’

‘I see! But hasn’t Miss Oppenheim any relations?’

‘None living nearer than India, and no one that takes any interest in her affairs. At the outside she can’t come into more than a few thousands; still, unless I have a little breathing-time, I must draw her capital from my vested funds, and that is not what I want to do just at present, so it is convenient to me to keep her in the dark as to her real position.’

‘Say no more, papa. I will make the best of the incubus. And, indeed, I do not know whether, after all, the companionship of a lady may not leave me freer than ever. I am terribly tied, you know, as to etiquette and all that nonsense.’

‘True! and you need make no fuss over Miss Oppenheim. I want her to believe that she is greatly indebted to us for the offer of a home, so put her in her proper position from the first, and make her a sort of humble companion to yourself. Take her out with you,

or leave her behind, just as you think fit. I don't wish to inconvenience you in the slightest degree, Selina.'

'All right, papa! And when am I to expect the young lady to arrive?'

'I shall bring her over to-morrow. She is quite alone, with the exception of a servant, and I think it as well she should leave the house before the funeral takes place. Besides it will prevent her gossiping over her affairs with strangers, and getting ideas put into her head which we may find it difficult to eradicate.'

As Mr. Farthingale had proposed, so it came to pass, and the following day saw Miss Janet Oppenheim an inmate of their home. The cab with her boxes and herself drove up to the door, just an hour after Vivian Chasemore had left the house to return to the lodgings in Drury Lane.

Miss Oppenheim was of the order of

‘catty’ women. Many people would have called her good-looking, but there was a strong ‘feline’ expression about everything she did or said. Selina Farthingale was sharp and cunning; Janet Oppenheim was intensely ‘sly.’ She had large prominent eyes of a light blue colour that were seldom raised; a long nose that drooped at the end, and a sharp-pointed chin that turned upwards, with a small puckered mouth that looked as if butter could not melt in it. Her pale straw-coloured hair was drawn plainly off her face and twisted in a coronet round her head. She was a woman who might be capable of any amount of deceit, and malice, and revenge; who might conceive it and carry it out to the end, always with the same downcast eyes and puckered mouth. She could have taken in any man, even the enemy of mankind himself. Everybody, in fact, except Mr. Farthingale. She quite took in Mr. Farthingale’s daughter.

When Selina first saw this soft pussy-cat creature, with the sly eyes and the low voice, she believed she could do anything she chose with her. She had intended to keep Miss Oppenheim in her presumed place from the beginning, but Janet never gave her an opportunity of doing so. She was so reserved and timid that she had to be coaxed to be made to talk at all ; and her apologies for the commonest trouble taken for her, and her entreaties that no one should put themselves out of the way on her account, became painful to listen to. Miss Selina lost no time in trying to ascertain, on her papa's account, how much Janet Oppenheim knew of the position in which her aunt, Mrs. Mathers, had left her ; but at the close of the interview she was obliged to confess herself unable to decide the extent of her guest's knowledge.

‘ It was so good of your dear papa to offer me the shelter of his home,’ Miss Oppen-

heim purred. 'What should a poor girl like myself have done all alone in those lodgings? And I have never been used to do anything for myself, you see. My poor aunt was like a mother to me. I have never known what it is to have a wish ungratified.'

'That is a pity, isn't it?' replied Selina. 'So many women have to work for their own living in this world, that it does not do to be brought up too softly, unless one has certain prospects in the future.'

'True, dear Miss Farthingale; and perhaps I have been more indulged than is good for me. Still it was my dear aunt's pleasure, and she had a right to do as she chose.'

'Her death must make a great change for you, does it not?'

'Ah! not whilst I am with you and your father in this charming home. I fear it is quite wrong and ungrateful of me to feel so

comfortable here as I do. And will you forgive me, dear Miss Farthingale, if I say that I cannot help feeling as if you were already my friend ?’

Selina was not much given to making friends with her own sex ; but she stumbled over some phrase relative to her hoping Miss Oppenheim would look upon her as such, in reply. She had received a second admonition from her father to be sure and keep their guest in good temper for the present.

‘ I have always conceived so high an idea of what female friendship should be,’ murmured Janet. ‘ I remember, when I was at school, being quite laughed at for the strength with which I handled the subject in an essay, that won the first prize in the annual examination.’

‘ Where were you educated ?’

‘ At St. Anne’s College, Lymehurst. Mrs. Mathers gave me the very first advantages.

She considered it quite necessary that I should be able to teach others, if so required.'

'Oh! educated for a governess,' thought Miss Selina; 'she can't have been reared with expectations. Mrs. Mathers intended you for a teacher, then,' she continued aloud.

'Until my cousin William died. He was her grandson, you know, and I am only her grandniece. But when aunt was relieved of placing him in the world, she had me home from St. Anne's at once, and I have lived with her ever since.'

'Does she mean by that, that the money William was to have inherited has come to her instead?' speculated her companion.

The next words Miss Oppenheim said seemed to contradict the idea.

'How different our lots in life are, dear Miss Farthingale! You—so rich and happy, surrounded by kind relations; and poor me

—alone and friendless, with so little to look forward to.’

‘We never can tell what is in the future for us.’

‘But we can pretty well guess. With all your advantages, you are sure to make a brilliant marriage before long.’

Miss Selina thought of Sir Arthur, and simpered. It was really pleasant to be purred over by this flattering pussy-cat.

‘That remains to be seen,’ she answered, smiling. ‘I may be an old maid after all.’

‘Oh, never! never!’ cried Miss Oppenheim, clasping her hands; ‘that would be an impossibility. Now, confess, dear Miss Farthingale, that you are engaged already.’

‘I shall confess no such thing.’

‘But I’m sure I’m right. To a duke, perhaps, or an earl! No? Then to a baronet, at the very least.’

‘Well, there are more unlikely things in

the future than that I shall be "my lady," I must say,' replied Selina, with a self-conscious air.

'I was *certain* of it. Oh, let me take a very, *very* great liberty, and ask his name.'

'It is "Sir Arthur," but I shall not tell you a word more. You must guess all the rest for yourself.'

'*Sir Arthur!* What a heavenly name! And he is tall, I feel, and noble in appearance, and very handsome.'

'You will see him before long, and be able to judge for yourself. But remember he is only a friend. I am no more engaged to him than you are.'

'Oh, I cannot believe that!'

'It is true, nevertheless.'

'Then if you are not, you soon will be, dear Miss Farthingale, for I know it is entirely with yourself. And you will be "my lady," and you will let me be your very

faithful, humble little friend to your life's end,' exclaimed Miss Janet Oppenheim, in an ecstasy of modest enthusiasm, as she knelt beside Selina and kissed her hand.



CHAPTER VI.

‘WHEN SHALL YOU BE COMING BACK?’

As Vivian Chasemore walked back from Mr. Farthingale’s house in Kensington to his old lodgings in Drury Lane, he caught himself more than once whistling in the gladness of his heart, until he remembered that he was about to leave his Bohemian life behind him, and must drop his Bohemian manners at the same time. The recollection only made him happier.

He had accommodated himself to the society he had adopted, but he had never felt in his own sphere since leaving home. The

etiquette of the family dinner of the evening before had revealed to him, as it were in a glance, how much he had wronged himself in believing that he could give up all the amenities of social life without regret. He had left his father's house without thought, and had been too proud to sue for forgiveness afterwards. The fact is, Vivian had never had a happy home. His mother had died early, and his father been much away on foreign service, during which period the child had been left in charge of his grandparents, Sir Peregrine and Lady Chasemore. When he was twenty, however, his father, then a general, had retired from the army, and married the widow of an old brother officer, a flaunting, showy woman, of middle age. It was then poor Vivian's miseries began. He had been old enough to see all the wrong that went on under his father's very eyes, and too young to tell the old man what

a fool his new wife was making of him. Quarrel after quarrel took place between his stepmother and himself, until he told her openly that her disgraceful conduct was making their name a jest and a by-word in the neighbourhood, and that he, for one, was determined to stand it no longer.

Mrs. Chasemore carried this story, with many exaggerations, to the general, who ordered his son to apologise or leave the house. Vivian chose the latter alternative. He ran away, then and there, with ten pounds in his pocket, and carried a banner on the stage of old Drury Lane, until his talents and address gained him the notice of the manager of the theatre and a better engagement. And since that time he had been acting, here, there, and everywhere, taking chiefly the parts of old men in comedy, for which he had a peculiar *forte*, so that many of his intimate friends had

watched the tottering gait and listened to the quavering voice of Alfred Waverley, without dreaming that beneath the false forehead, and wrinkles, and crows'-feet, there lay the handsome, laughing face of Vivian Chasemore. He had laughed more than he had felt inclined to do. His was a happy, buoyant temperament that made the best of everything; but he had had many lonely and desolate hours during the term of his banishment, in which the whole of life looked so dark and hopeless that he questioned whether he would not be wiser to end his perplexities with a dose of prussic acid.

That was all over now, he remembered with a joyous laugh, as he sped along from Kensington to Drury Lane. His dear old grandfather, who had been very fond of him when a little child, but whom he had never credited with so much partiality since, had left him independent for life. He had nothing

to do thenceforward but enjoy himself in the society he liked best, and that, Vivian could not help feeling, would be the society in which he had been reared, however grateful he might feel to those who had been his friends in exile.

Under the influence of such feelings, it was with a face even more beaming than usual that he burst into the little greengrocer's shop (how much smaller and narrower it looked even now than it had done yesterday !), where Mrs. Bell, with her work in her hand, was keeping guard behind the counter.

‘La! Mr. Waverley, sir! is it you? I thought we should see you back again some time to-day; but Bonnie, she’s bin fidgeting like anythink over your dinner, and a wonderin’ whether you’ll take this, or whether you’ll take that; and as I said to ’er, what’s the use, when if Mr. Waverley ’e wants anythink, ’e’s sure to come ’ome and tell us so himself.’

‘Right as usual, Mrs. Bell! For, as it happens, I’ve only run over for an hour or two, to look after my things, and shall not dine here to-day at all.’

‘Going back to your friends, sir, I suppose? Well, I’m glad to hear it, if so be they’re good friends to you; for a young man is beset by temptations in a place like London, and the more respectable people ’e knows the better. That’s what *I* say.’

‘Just so, Mrs. Bell! Yes; my friends have been very kind to me, and I am sure you’ll be glad to hear that I’ve come into a bit of good luck at last.’

‘Well, I never! Have you now? That’s just what the little gennelman said yesterday, that he’d good news for you. I ’ope it’s money, Mr. Waverley. Money is hevery-think to a young man just startin’ in life.’

‘Yes; it is money.’

‘I am glad! A nice little sum too, I ’ope.

Enough to set you goin' when you takes a wife.'

'Quite enough and to spare. Though I never mean to be such a fool as to marry, Mrs. Bell.'

'La! sir, you shouldn't speak in that way of holy matrimony. I can't abear to hear the young people nowadays a-ridicoolin' of marriage as if it 'twasn't nothin'. Why, when *I* was a gal, I'm sure the first thing we thinked of was an 'usband; and it was "catch who catch can" amongst us, directly a young man made 'is appearance.'

'Poor fellow!' said Vivian gravely, as he seated himself on the counter; 'but I shouldn't have minded being caught by *you*, Mrs. Bell.'

'Get along with your nonsense, sir! What I means is this: all the young folk seem set against nature nowadays. The men don't want to have wives, and when the gals

is married they don't want to 'ave children. Why, it's regular flyin' in the face of Providence. Look at my Bonnie, now. She might marry as nice a young man to-morrow as ever stepped, but she won't 'ave a word to say to 'im.'

'Who's that? Kit Masters?'

'Yes, sir; he's regular in earnest arter 'er, but she slapped his poor face yesterday, so that you might 'ave 'eard it down at White-chapel.'

Vivian laughed.

'Oh, that means nothing, Mrs. Bell. When girls slap a man's face, they want to be kissed in return. Masters ought to have known that; he isn't half a sharp fellow.'

'Pr'aps not, sir; but 'e's got the means to keep 'er well, and pervide for 'er arter I'm gone, and she's a fool to say "nay" to 'im; but Bonnie was always a bit daft, you know, Mr. Waverley, and not like other gals.'

‘Where is she now, Mrs. Bell?’

‘In your rooms, I think. Seems to me she spends ’alf ’er time a-dustin’ of nothin’. She ain’t good for much, I know; and Masters, or any other man that gets ’er, will ’ave a sorry bargain.’

‘I dare say Bonnie will come round after a little, Mrs. Bell; I’ll talk to her, and see if I cannot persuade her to give Kit Masters a trial.’

‘Aye, do, Mr. Waverley! She thinks a deal of you, Bonnie does, and of what you say, and will take your word afore mine, any day.’

‘All right; I’ll try my best,’ replied Vivian, as he got off the counter and went upstairs.

Bonnie was sweeping the sitting-room, with a duster tied round her head to keep the dust from her hair. She looked very pretty in her homely head-dress, though she blushed

scarlet at being discovered so attired, and tried hard to get rid of it.

‘Don’t pull it off, Bonnie!’ exclaimed Vivian ; ‘it looks uncommonly nice and tidy, I can tell you.’

‘But I can’t go on sweepin’ whilst you’re here, Mr. Waverley.’

‘I don’t want you to do so ; I want you to come and help me turn out my old portman-teau and the other boxes.’

‘La, Mr. Waverley ! whatever for ? You’re not going away again directly, are you ?’

There was such visible disappointment in the droop of Bonnie’s pretty mouth, as she put the question, that Vivian was quite touched. It had not entered into his calculations that his stroke of good fortune might prove to be a great loss to his humble friends.

‘Why, what do you wish me to stay for, Bonnie ? I give a lot of trouble, you know,

and make a terrible noise ; the house must be ever so much quieter when I am away.'

'I never complained of the trouble, sir,' replied the girl, with downcast eyes.

'Come here, and sit by me, Bonnie, on the sofa. No ; never mind the duster or the apron ; I want to talk to you. I've lived in this house, on and off, for four years, and you've always been a kind little friend to me ; and so I think you will be pleased to hear of my good fortune : I've had some money left me, Bonnie.'

'Ave you, sir ? that *is* good ! Is it twenty pounds—or more ?'

'It is more than twenty pounds, Bonnie, a great deal. It is enough to enable me to live comfortably, without doing any work. I need never run about the country again, from one theatre to another, as I have been used to do. I can leave the stage altogether, and settle down where I choose.'

Bonnie's face grew radiant.

'Oh! I *am* glad, Mr. Waverley! I am truly glad to hear it. And now you need never spare yourself tobacco nor beer again, nor summat nice for your dinner, like a roast duck, or that. And oh, Mr. Waverley, sir! you'll 'ave curtains put up to the bed against winter, won't you, to keep out that draught from the door that used to cut so when you 'ad the influenza?'

'And when a certain little girl was so kind as to hang up her best gown to shield me from the cold! I haven't forgotten that, Bonnie; and when I get my money you shall have the prettiest gown that is to be bought, in remembrance of your own goodness.'

'La, sir! 'twas nothin',' replied Bonnie, with a shamed face. 'I'd 'ave done the same for any one.'

Vivian perceived that the girl imagined that, fortune or no fortune, he would continue

to live on at the greengrocer's shop, and was wondering how to break the news to her of his certain departure.

‘Well, then, as I’m not going to act again, you see, all my theatrical dresses will be of no further use to me, so I want to pack them up and send them to my friend Mr. Selwyn, who has just telegraphed to say he will take my engagement at Swansea. That is the gentleman who nursed me through the brain fever two years ago—you remember, Bonnie?—and my dresses and wigs will be valuable to him, though they are of no further use to me. Will you help me to sort them, and put them all away in the big black box?’

‘Willingly, sir!’ cried Bonnie. ‘And won’t the gentleman be pleased when ’e gets ’em. But you won’t send away that lovely violet velvet coat, with the satin breeches, Mr. Waverley, will you?’

‘Yes, everything! I never wish to look

at them again,' replied Vivian, as he tossed dresses, wigs, jewelled rapiers, and buckled shoes, one after the other, out of the chests of drawers, and Bonnie packed them for him in a travelling-trunk.

When the task was completed, he wrote a legible direction for the box :

‘TO EVERARD SELWYN, ESQ.,
‘Theatre Royal,
‘Swansea,’

and told the girl it was to be fetched away by the railway-van that evening.

‘I will write and tell Mr. Selwyn it is coming,’ he added. ‘Well, that’s over, and it’s a relief to my mind. Good-bye to the old days, and all the hard work, anxiety, and suspense that accompanied them! And now for the rest of my things, what am I to do with them?’

He intended to leave the greater part of

his property with Mrs. Bell, to be disposed of as she thought fit, but he put the question in order to introduce the subject of his departure.

‘Why, what should you do with them?’ demanded Bonnie. ‘You’re never going to throw away your shirts and pocket-handkerchiefs and socks, Mr. Waverley? What’ll you do without ’em?’

‘Buy new ones, Bonnie. These have seen good service.’

‘But they’ll do to knock about of a morning, sir, if they’re not good enough for you to go out in. ’Twould be ten thousand pities to throw ’em away.’

‘There’s no need to do that. Your grandmother can sell them, or give them away, or do what she pleases with them. I shall only take a change of linen and the suit I wear with me.’

‘Take ’em *where*?’ demanded Bonnie.

‘To my friend’s house or to the hotel. I think I shall go to an hotel for a day or two.’

‘To an hotel!’ repeated the girl, vaguely; ‘but why, sir? When shall you be coming back to us again?’

‘Well, to tell you the truth, Bonnie,’ replied Vivian, slowly, ‘I don’t quite think I shall come back—not to sleep you know. Of course I shall come and see you and your grandmother sometimes; but I shall live in bigger rooms than these now, and in a different part of London: and though I’m very sorry to leave you and Mrs. Bell, who have always been so kind and attentive to me, yet it wouldn’t suit my altered circumstances, you see, to keep on these little rooms.’

‘*Not come back!*’ said Bonnie, with a half-frightened stare.

Vivian had watched the girl’s colour ebb and flow as he spoke to her, and saw that the announcement he had made was anything but

a pleasurable one, but he was scarcely prepared to meet the livid countenance she turned towards him now.

‘Not to live here,’ he repeated kindly; ‘but I shall often see you, dear Bonnie, I hope.’

He put his hand upon her shoulder as he spoke, but she shook it off as if it hurt her, and he saw that she was shivering violently.

‘Bonnie! Bonnie! what is the matter? What have I said to make you like this?’ he asked, as he bent over her.

‘Oh, go your ways and don’t mind me!’ replied the girl, vehemently; ‘’T ain’t nothin’ along of what you’ve said. It’s my poor head aches so terrible I can hardly bear myself.’

And in illustration of the fact, Bonnie, throwing her apron over her head, burst into a storm of tears and rocked herself backwards and forwards. Vivian kept a small stock of wine in a buffet in his sitting-room. He un-

locked it now, and pouring out a glass of sherry, tried to put it to the girl's lips. But she pushed it from her, so that it was spilt upon the carpet. He waited for a few minutes till her agitation had somewhat subsided, and then asked her how she felt. He had not the slightest belief in the headache she had so suddenly conjured up, but considered it quite natural all the same that a pretty girl should cry at the idea of parting with him.

‘Shall I call your grandmother, Bonnie?’

‘No, no! let the old woman be. She'd send me off to bed at once, and then I couldn't help you with the packing. What more's to go, Mr. Waverley? The pain's easier now, and I can do all you want for you without no grandmothers.’

‘There's nothing more to pack, Bonnie. I have put what I require in my bag; and what I leave behind I wish you to do

exactly as you think best with. But I should like you to take my books and pictures, and the little clock, and anything else about the rooms that belongs to me, and keep them for your own self, just in remembrance of the years we've passed together, will you ?

'I'll keep 'em for *you*, sir. P'r'aps some day you may want 'em back again, and then you'll find 'em safe, just as you left 'em in my care.'

'Thank you, Bonnie, but I would rather you considered them your own. You will be married some day, and have a nice little house, and they may help to make it pretty. I shall never want them again, my dear. I am richer than you think.'

'Very, very rich ?' she said, with a sob.

'Yes, very rich, compared to what I have been ; and never likely to want any of the old things again.'

‘You’ll be marryin’ some grand lady,’ exclaimed Bonnie, with sudden energy.

‘I don’t think so, Bonnie. I’ve no wish to marry anybody yet awhile. But talking of marriage reminds me of something. What is your objection to Kit Masters?’

The girl’s eyes blazed.

‘Kit Masters! Who’s bin coupling our names before you, Mr. Waverley?’

‘Your grandmother told me that he had proposed to marry you, but that you refused to have anything to say to him.’

‘Yes! and allays will,’ rejoined Bonnie.

‘But how is that? He is a very respectable, nice-looking young fellow, and well able to keep you. He’s got a horse and cart, and he told me once that his father owned a market garden in Surrey. You might come to be quite a rich woman some day if you married him, Bonnie?’

‘Aye! I might maybe, but I shan’t all the

same. I hate 'im and all the rest of 'em, and I won't 'ave nothin' to say to 'em.'

'But listen to me, Bonnie ; I want to tell you something. You're a nice little girl, you know, and I should like to see you married. Your grandmother can't live for ever ; and you're too pretty and too young to carry on the shop by yourself. So you ought to get a good husband ; and from what I hear, I think Masters is likely to make you one.'

'Aye ! will he ?' said the girl, indifferently.

'Mrs. Bell says he's very fond of you ; and indeed he told me so himself. And what I mean to do for you is this : On the day you're married—I don't care to whom, so long as he's a good fellow—I shall give you the entire furniture for a four-roomed house—real good furniture, Bonnie ; and the wedding-gown and bonnet beside ; and the wedding-cake too, if you like—for I shall never forget the many months I've slept

under this roof, nor the good honest people that have waited on me here.'

'Oh! that's what you'll do for me, is it?' cried the girl, glaring with sudden passion as she sprang up from her seat and confronted Vivian; 'then you may keep all your good intentions to yourself, Mr. Waverley, for I shan't never marry Kit Masters, or any of that lot. How do you think I could do it? How do you think I could do it?' she went on in a piteous, faltering voice; 'to bind myself to a nasty coarse ruffian like that, who can think o' nothin' but his 'orse and cart? Grandmother calls me "daft;" but I must be dafter than I am now afore I ties myself down to serve Kit Masters all the days of my life.'

Her vehemence took Vivian so completely by surprise, that he looked at her in perfect astonishment. Bonnie had always seemed such a quiet, soft-spoken, smiling little girl to

him. He could never have credited her with the expression of so much feeling. And to call Kit Masters a coarse ruffian, too ; a man in her own station of life, and rather above it. Why, what could the child be dreaming of ? At the same time her reproaches had placed him in a totally false position, and he felt called upon to ask her pardon for having offended her.

‘ I am so sorry I spoke, Bonnie ; I didn’t mean to make you angry ; but I will never mention marriage to you again, if you don’t like it. I shan’t be cheated out of giving you a present, though ; for, married or single, you must have a smart gown to remember me by, as sure as my name’s——’

He was going to add ‘ Vivian Chasemore,’ but stopped short at the very utterance of the syllables. It struck him suddenly, he hardly knew why, that he would rather be known in that little household by the old name only.

‘What did you say, sir?’ demanded Bonnie, curiosity getting the upper hand of her trouble.

‘Nothing, Bonnie—it is of no consequence; but you must have the gown. And now I shall go downstairs and finish my talk with your grandmother.’

The talk proved very satisfactory to Mrs. Bell, although she was sorry to hear she was to lose her lodger. But Mr. Waverley ‘be’aved ’isself like a real gentleman,’ as she told Kit Masters the next day, ‘and paid me two months’ rent, which I ’ope ’e may be as lucky as he deserves to be.’

‘You was allays too good for a play-actor, sir,’ was her comment, as Vivian told her of his altered circumstances; ‘and I’ve said so, far and near, ever since I first saw ye. You’ve a look altogether above it, and I felt you was bemeaned. And so I wishes you all the possible good in this world, and

'opes you'll come to think higher of matrimony, and 'ave a good wife to yourself.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Bell. When I *do* have a wife, I hope sincerely I *shall* have her to myself. And now that we've settled our little account, I'll just run upstairs and have one parting kiss from Bonnie before I set off on my travels.'

He ran upstairs, but he could find Bonnie nowhere. He looked in each room on the upper landing without success. He could not hear the poor child sobbing her heart out amongst the pile of dusty papers in the cupboard, and reached the shop again disappointed.

'She isn't there, Mrs. Bell : but I shall be round again before long. So give her my love, and say, by hook or by crook, I must have that kiss next time we meet.'

'La, Mr. Waverley! you was allays a one for your fun, sir,' replied the greengrocer's

widow, as Vivian Chasemore shook hands with her cordially, and left the scene of his humiliation, for as such he had already begun to regard it, far behind him. Mr. Farthingale had supplied him with ready money, and he turned into one of the most fashionable hotels and ordered his rooms and his dinner, as if he had never been accustomed to anything in lower style. Then he had an interview with his tailor and his bootmaker and outfitter, and, before night, was established in comfort, and with all the paraphernalia of a gentleman about him. As he sat in the smoking-room that evening, after dinner, content to watch the curling clouds he blew into the air, and ruminate upon his altered prospects, one circumstance alone puzzled him: *who* had put Mr. Farthingale upon his track, or connected the name of Alfred Waverley with that of the missing Vivian Chasemore? He had forgotten, in the excitement of the discovery,

to ask the lawyer that question, nor had his cousin Sir Arthur mooted it. He was sure none of his theatrical friends knew his real cognomen, or that, guessing it, they would have given it up without asking his consent. He became so curious on this subject that he visited Mr. Farthingale's office the first thing in the morning, to learn the truth ; but, to his surprise, the lawyer was as ignorant as himself.

‘We had been advertising your name and description in the papers for two months, Mr. Chasemore, without success, when, the day before I found you in Drury Lane, I received a dirty crumpled letter, badly written and without signature, informing me that if I inquired at a certain address I should hear news of a lodger who went by the name of Waverley, but answered to your description. We had offered fifty pounds’ reward for any information leading to your discovery, and in

this communication it was intimated that if Mr. Waverley proved to be Mr. Chasemore, the writer would apply in person for the reward, and produce a duplicate of the letter in proof of his identity. But he has not appeared yet.'

'He is sure to do so, I suppose?' said Vivian.

'Sure, as that fifty pounds is not to be earned easily every day!'

'I am most curious to find out who it is.'

'There will be no difficulty, Mr. Chasemore. Of course the money will not be paid until we have received direct proof of the justice of the claim, with the name and occupation of the applicant.'

'Whoever can it be?' repeated Vivian, with puzzled brows.



CHAPTER VII.

‘WE SHALL NEVER BE MORE THAN
ACQUAINTANCES.’

REGINA NETTLESHIP had invited Mrs. Runnymede to spend the afternoon with her, in her mamma’s apartments, which was a more remarkable occurrence than may at first sight appear to be. For though Mrs. Runnymede had, by reason of many circumstances, been installed chief friend to Lady William, she was the detestation of her daughter. Regina was proud and cold, and smarted hourly under the many indignities which their poverty thrust upon them; but

the worst of all to her was being forced to endure the company and familiarities and obligations of the lady alluded to. Mrs. Runnymede was not their equal in birth or position. She was their superior only by the fact of having a longer purse and being lavish with her money, and Miss Nettleship hated to see their vases filled with the flowers she brought, and to know that when they went out together she paid for their luncheons and cabs, and lent small sums to her mother which were never returned.

Yet the buxom Mrs. Runnymede sat in the drawing-room that afternoon by her invitation, and Regina was doing her best to make herself agreeable to her. The fact is, it was the third day after the return of Vivian Chasemore to his family—the day on which Sir Arthur had avowed his intention of making another call upon her—and as the weather was showery, and Lady William

was confined to her bedroom with a cold, Miss Nettleship had thought it as well to secure herself against an awkward *tête-à-tête* with the enamoured baronet. She had not told her mother of the terrible mistake she had made; of the predicament into which she had so nearly fallen; and which, had Mr. Farthingale's apposite appearance been delayed by ten minutes, might have seriously entangled her with Sir Arthur Chasemore.

She knew that the baronet considered she had as good as given her word to marry him; but Regina remembered with a sigh of relief that she had *not* so given it, and that it only required a little womanly *finesse* on her part to be quit of her half-accomplished bargain. Still, she did not intend to dismiss Sir Arthur until she had seen what chances she might have with his rich cousin; she was not one to drop the bone for the shadow; and therefore she felt that, at all

hazards, she must avoid being left alone with him to risk a repetition of the scene she had already gone through, until she had finally made up her mind on the subject. Whilst she was deliberating whether she should seclude herself for the day in Lady William's bedroom, or run the chance of a cold by walking out in the rain, Mrs. Runnymede had 'dropped in' to luncheon, and Regina had made her promise to remain with her for the rest of the day. She even swallowed her disgust at seeing a *paté de foie gras* and a basket of flowers and fruit handed out of the cab that conveyed Mrs. Runnymede to their door (for that lady seldom visited them empty-handed), and praised the viands when they appeared upon the luncheon-table, although she felt as if each mouthful would choke her.

Mrs. Runnymede had evidently been handsome in her youth, with a bold, high-

coloured beauty which had now degenerated into coarseness. She had large features and large limbs, and was altogether rather oppressive in a small room. She dyed her hair of an auburn colour, and dropped belladonna into her eyes to make them appear still larger than they were by nature, and fancied herself so secure against detection on both points as to be able openly to remonstrate with Lady William for rouging the cheeks and blacking the eye-brows of her shaking palsied old head. Mrs. Runnymede always professed to have very weak sight and delicate nerves. The first thing she did on entering a room was to let down the blinds and sit as far away from the window as possible, shading her eyes with her hands. Some people thought it was the belladonna that made her eyes so bloodshot and watery-looking; others that it was occasioned by an extra glass of sherry: but Mrs. Runnymede

herself said it was all the trouble she had gone through and the many tears she had shed, and presumably she knew the truth of the matter. She had one virtue to counteract her foibles : she was very good-natured, at least with those to whom it served her purpose to be so.

But Regina Nettleship would have suffered less under insults from Mrs. Runnymede's hand than she did under the presents it extended to her, and which, if she refused, her mother accepted instead.

As the two women sat opposite to each other in the little drawing-room they formed a striking contrast. Notwithstanding the summer shower, the temperature was exceedingly warm, and a deeper flush than usual had mounted to the elder lady's cheek. But scarcely any colour illumined Regina's marble face. She looked like an ice-maiden, with her purely-cut features, and the pale

gold hair that was wound in a classical fashion about her head. Her dress—which, except for a little fall of lace about the throat and wrists, was perfectly plain—was only an old white alpaca which had been washed till it turned yellow; but its folds sat upon her lissom figure as if she had been a queen. There was a cold purity and dignity about all her movements, and her very way of speaking, that, from whatever source it was derived, struck every spectator who saw Regina Nettleship for the first time. As she moved slowly and gracefully about the ill-kept and ill-furnished apartment, she might have been Semiramis treading the marble courts of Nineveh, or Zenobia in the groves of Palmyra, or Cleopatra floating in her gilded barge on the bosom of the Nile. And Mrs. Runnymede, notwithstanding her self-appreciation, recognised the superiority of tone and manner in her young com-

panion, and felt mean and common beside it.

‘Have you not been out at all to-day, Miss Nettleship?’ she demanded. (It was strange that, for all her intimacy at Lady William’s house, she had never yet arrived at calling Regina by her Christian name.)

‘Yes; I went in Kensington Gardens this morning, but the wind rose so suddenly I was obliged to come home. I met with a curious adventure, too: quite matter for a novel,’ said Miss Nettleship, with a smile at the remembrance.

‘What was that?’

‘I was in the Broad Walk when a gust of wind suddenly caught me under the hat. The elastic broke, and off went my hat half-way to Bayswater! I didn’t know what on earth to do—I couldn’t run after it, you know, and there it was, scudding before the wind like a hoop. So I turned to a little

boy and said, "If you'll run after that hat and bring it back to me, I'll give you a penny." The child stared at me like a fool, and I was just going to repeat my offer when a gentleman sprang up from a bench close at hand, and saying "Permit me," ran with all his might and main after my hat. You cannot think how ashamed I felt. Quite a crowd gathered round me, and made remarks upon it. I could have cried with vexation, and if there had been a cab within sight, I should have got into it and come home and left the hat behind me.'

'Oh! that would have been very foolish, and when the gentleman had offered to recover it for you.'

'I could not endure to stand there with my bare head and all the *canaille* staring at me. However, there was no alternative, and it must have been more than ten minutes before I got my hat back again.'

‘What was he like?’

‘The gentleman? Oh! he was young and good-looking, I think. But the chief thing is, that having restored my property to me, he walked off and left his own behind him.’

‘How was that?’

‘He had deposited a small parcel on the bench when he gave chase to my hat, and after he had disappeared again, one of the children directed my attention to it. So I took it in charge; but after having walked about the Park for nearly an hour in search of him without success, I brought it home with me. And now I do not know what on earth to do with it.’

‘You must keep it till the owner claims it.’

‘But how shall I ever find him again? He doesn’t know my name, and I don’t know his. I left our address with the park-keeper

in case he applies to him. If we hear nothing in a few days, I suppose we must advertise it.'

'What sort of a parcel is it?'

'Here it is,' said Regina, bringing a small, neatly-sealed packet from a side-table. 'It feels hard, but I cannot imagine what it is.'

Mrs. Runnymede pinched the parcel in every direction.

'I can tell you, my dear! It's jewellery.

'Oh, I hope not! I thought it felt like a box of Seidlitz powders.'

'Not a bit of it. That's a morocco jewel-case. I know the feel of it perfectly. And it's wrapped in white paper too, and sealed. No one but chemists and jewellers use wax.'

'What will the poor young man do? In his haste to oblige me, he cannot have entirely forgotten he had placed the parcel

by his side. Ought we to send a notice to the police-station, or an advertisement to the newspapers ?

‘ I should wait a day or two, and see what happens. *He* will probably advertise for it himself, if the contents are valuable. What was he like ?’

‘ You’ve asked me that question already,’ replied Miss Nettleship, coldly. ‘ I don’t look at everybody I may meet in the streets, Mrs. Runnymede.’

‘ Of course not ! But you might have observed whether the preserver of your hat was handsome or ugly—a gentleman or a snob.’

‘ He was a gentleman—I know nothing more,’ said Regina, as she deposited the white packet on the side-table again. She did know more. She had seen and observed that the stranger was unusually good-looking, and that he had cast more than one glance of

admiration at herself. But she would have considered it lowering to discuss such topics with Mrs. Runnymede.

It was at this juncture that the servant announced Sir Arthur Chasemore, and the baronet entered the room, with visible disappointment at not finding Miss Nettleship alone.

After the usual greetings from the two ladies, and a polite inquiry after the health of Lady William, Sir Arthur resigned himself to his fate, and sank into a chair to be bored by Mrs. Runnymede.

‘And now you must tell us all about your cousin, Sir Arthur,’ she exclaimed fervently. ‘Everybody in London has heard the news of his return, and is dying to see him. The Stingoes are going to give a party on purpose to introduce him to their friends. And I hear he’s staying with those odious Farthingales. Is that the case?’

‘He did stay with them for one night, Mrs. Runnymede, but he has now removed to his hotel.’

‘Oh, indeed! Much to the chagrin of Miss Selina, I dare say. It is easy to guess why old Farthingale was so anxious to invite Mr. Vivian Chasemore to his house.’

‘You forget,’ interposed Regina, loftily, ‘who the Farthingales are. I should hardly imagine that in their most excited moments they could seriously contemplate marrying into Sir Arthur’s family.’

Sir Arthur cast a glance of gratitude towards her.

‘Hardly,’ he murmured, in a tone of acquiescence.

‘I don’t think there are any limits to their expectations,’ said Mrs. Runnymede. ‘Mr. Farthingale thinks his purse is long enough to accomplish anything.’

‘Which is only another proof of his own

incompetency,' remarked Regina. 'Did you see your cousin the other evening, Sir Arthur?'

'Yes, I dined there! And yesterday I was with him at his hotel. He is very anxious for an introduction to you, Miss Nettleship, and I ventured to promise him one. Did I take too great a liberty?'

'Certainly not! Mamma and I wish to know him.'

'He said he would meet me here this afternoon at about five o'clock, when I hope to have the pleasure of presenting him to you.'

'Mr. Vivian Chasemore coming here to-day!' exclaimed Mrs. Runnymede. 'Oh, that is delightful! Why, we are all longing to see him, Sir Arthur. He is quite the hero of the day, you know. Such a romantic history, and such a lot of money! Half the *salons* of London will be open to him.'

‘Yes! he is a lucky fellow, as far as wealth is concerned; and I trust we shall not find that the calling he was so unfortunately led to adopt, has deteriorated his manners for society. Is there no chance of my seeing Lady William to-day, Miss Nettleship?’

‘Not the slightest, Sir Arthur. Mamma is in bed. She caught a cold coming home the other night from the Stingoos, I think, and has been poorly ever since.’

‘I am so grieved to hear it. I particularly wished to see her this afternoon.’

‘Can I give her any message from you?’ said Regina, pertinaciously keeping her eyes turned away from those of the baronet.

‘Yes; I should like to send her one—that is, if you would be so good as to deliver it,’ replied Sir Arthur, as he glanced in a peculiar manner towards Mrs. Runnymede. That lady took the hint, and rising from her chair negligently, walked into the next room,

which was divided from them by half-closed folding-doors, saying :

‘ Did I leave my hand-bag with my bonnet and shawl, Miss Nettleship ?’

Regina would have rushed after her, under the pretence of affording her assistance, had not Sir Arthur laid a detaining hand upon her arm and drawn her towards the window.

‘ Forgive me,’ he said, ‘ but I am longing to speak to you. Do send that woman with some message up to your mother.’

But Regina drew herself backwards.

‘ Excuse me, Sir Arthur ; I cannot favour one guest at the expense of another. Mrs. Runnymede is spending the day with me, on my own invitation.’

‘ How unfortunate ! I was in hopes you would have kept this afternoon for me. But I must look forward to better luck to-morrow.’

He had taken her left hand in his as

he spoke, and was trying to slip a ring upon the third finger. Regina snatched it forcibly away.

‘Sir Arthur, what are you doing? Pray remember yourself.’

‘It is only a ring, Regina—a trumpery thing not worthy of your acceptance; but you will wear it, I trust, as a pledge of our engagement, until I can replace it with another.’

‘Oh no, indeed I cannot!’ she whispered nervously.

‘You cannot! and why?’

‘Mamma would not like it. She is very particular, and she knows nothing yet of what took place the other day.’

‘But you will tell her, will you not?’

‘I don’t know. I am not sure.’

‘Regina, there is something beneath all this. Why do you speak to me in so strange a manner? Have you already regretted the

promise you made to me the day before yesterday?’

‘I never made any promise,’ she replied.

‘The words you spoke then, and by which you led me to believe that your feelings were reciprocal to mine.’

‘Pray don’t talk of it now, Sir Arthur! You mustn’t hurry me so; you make me nervous, and then I don’t know what I am saying.’

‘I have no wish to hurry you. You shall take your own time for all things. But meanwhile accept the ring, if it is only to keep in your pocket until you can wear it before the world.’

‘Please don’t ask me! I would rather not.’

‘You are wounding me terribly!’ replied the baronet, as he replaced the ring whence he had taken it. ‘I came here with such different anticipations from these.’

‘You forget how new the idea is to me. It is too serious a matter to be decided in a moment. I say so for your sake as well as my own.’

‘I thought you had decided ; and therein lies my disappointment,’ said Sir Arthur. ‘I was so happy whilst I was buying that ring this morning. My cousin was with me, and asked my permission to buy a little souvenir for you on his own account. I thought, under the circumstances, there could be no objection to it ; and I believe he made a very handsome purchase, which I suppose will be wasted, like my own.’

‘I can accept nothing from your cousin on the score of being engaged to you,’ replied Regina. ‘I am engaged to no one, Sir Arthur, whatever my preferences may be ; and I do not intend to bind myself until I am quite sure it is for my own happiness and that of others. Mrs. Runnymede,’ she con-

tinued, raising her voice, 'cannot you find your hand-bag? I think I saw the servant place it on the sofa.'

At these words the other lady reappeared, and Sir Arthur, seeing the interview was at an end, bit his lip with vexation, and stood with his back to Regina, looking out of the window. He did not believe her decision to be a final one by any manner of means; but he was annoyed to think his wishes had run ahead of hers, and she was more lukewarm on the subject of their engagement than himself. That she was really trying to get rid of him he had not the slightest idea.

'Here is Vivian!' he said, in rather a sullen tone, a few minutes afterwards, as a hansom cab dashed up to the door.

Mrs. Runnymede bridled with curiosity and expectation. Miss Nettleship said nothing; but even in that brief moment she found time

to wonder to herself if the new-comer would prove more or less agreeable than his cousin, and if her charms would have any power to attract him.

How she wished she had been attired in a manner more worthy of her beauty ! for Regina knew she was handsome, and rated each one of her personal possessions at its highest value. She gave the washed alpaca robe an impatient twitch as the thought passed through her mind.

‘No more poverty for me,’ she said to herself, ‘if it is to be prevented either by fair means or foul.’

Meanwhile Sir Arthur, who had gone to the head of the stairs to receive his cousin, re-entered the room, with Vivian Chasemore in his train. He wished that something had prevented his coming. He had talked so confidently to him of being engaged to Miss Nettleship. And now he had only just had

time in a hurried whisper to beg Vivian not to make any allusion to the relations supposed to be existing between himself and that young lady.

‘All right!’ replied his cousin. ‘Fancy! Arthur, I’ve lost that bracelet.’

The baronet elevated his eyebrows, but could say nothing, for they were already in the room.

‘Miss Nettleship, allow me to present Mr. Vivian Chasemore to you.’

Regina rose in her stately manner, and was about to salute the stranger with one of her most graceful inclinations, when their eyes met.

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed faintly, as she stared at him; and Vivian’s first words were:

‘We have met before!’

‘*Where?*’ said Sir Arthur, in a tone of astonishment.

‘In the Park this morning, when this

young lady lost her hat, and I had the pleasure of restoring it to her.'

'How very strange!' rejoined Regina. 'Mrs. Runnymede, Mr. Chasemore is actually the gentleman I spoke to you about, who ran such a distance after my hat in Kensington Gardens to-day.'

'This *is* a coincidence,' said Mrs. Runnymede, as she bowed to Vivian. 'I assure you I've heard the whole story, Mr. Chasemore. Miss Nettleship could talk of nothing else when we first met.'

'Oh, and I've got the packet!' cried Regina. 'You left it on the bench, and I looked for you everywhere afterwards without success, so I brought it home with me.'

'It is very fortunate,' replied Vivian. 'It was rather an incumbrance in my pocket, and I laid it carelessly beside me whilst I sat down. Do you know I never even remembered its existence until I had returned to

my hotel, and then I could not recall where I had seen it last. It was really most good of you to have taken the trouble to carry it home, Miss Nettleship !

‘ I could hardly have done less, when it was the politeness with which you ran after my poor hat that had caused your loss. Had I heard nothing from the owner, I intended to advertise the packet. But little did I think that it belonged to Mr. Vivian Chase-more !’

They were so engrossed with each other, and with recalling the circumstances of their introduction, that they seemed altogether to have forgotten the existence of the baronet, who stood at a little distance, anything but pleased at being so completely left out of the matter. Regina looked quite animated too ; and Vivian’s handsome face was close to hers, as they talked of the gardens and the weather and the hat, and never mentioned

his name at all. At last, however, the packet brought it on the *tapis*.

‘Let me restore your property to you,’ said Miss Nettleship, as she lifted it from the side-table and placed it in Vivian’s hand. ‘The seals are not broken, you see—Mrs. Runnymede and I have not been tampering with them, although our female curiosity sorely tempted us to do so.’

Mrs. Runnymede was on the tiptoe of expectation to learn what the packet contained, when a message was delivered from Lady William desiring to see her in her bedroom, and she had no alternative but to leave the three young people together.

‘Will you gratify your curiosity now, Miss Nettleship,’ said Vivian, extending the parcel towards her, ‘and break the seals for yourself?’

‘Oh no! I could not think of doing so.’

‘But—if you will pardon my presumption

and be gracious enough to back the assertion—it is your property and not mine.’

Here Sir Arthur, guessing what his cousin was about to say, tried hard, by winking and frowning and shaking his head, to prevent it ; but Vivian, in his excitement and admiration of Regina, had entirely forgotten the caution given him upon the staircase, and went on unheedingly.

‘I do not understand you, Mr. Chasemore,’ said Miss Nettleship.

‘I mean, that when my cousin here, who I consider the luckiest fellow in creation, told me of the terms on which he stood with yourself, I asked his permission to present you with a trifling token of the friendship which I trust you may extend to me as his nearest relation. Do not think me too impertinent, then, Miss Nettleship, when I tell you that the packet you were so kind as to rescue from the bench, was intended for your

acceptance, and that if you will open it and keep the contents, you will do me the greatest favour possible.'

But the sight of Vivian Chasemore had been sufficient to make Regina Nettleship come to a decision respecting her future. She saw that he was ardent, impressionable, and admired her. She had read it in his eyes that morning: she saw it still more clearly now; and she was determined, even at the cost of losing the baronet, not to leave him under any false impressions regarding herself. So she put the packet from her—firmly and deliberately.

'I cannot accept any present from you, Mr. Chasemore, on such conditions.'

'On what conditions, Miss Nettleship? I trust I have not offended you.'

'Far from it, but you have been misled, and your generosity has been the sufferer. I am not on the terms you imagine with Sir Arthur Chasemore.'

‘Indeed! I am very sorry; it is a most stupid mistake of mine,’ stammered Vivian, who felt as awkward almost as his cousin.

‘Never mind, Vivian,’ interposed the baronet, nettled into anger by Regina’s coolness. ‘If the mistake has been on anybody’s side, it has been on mine. I told you the truth, and you drew the inference for yourself. We both forgot one thing, however, and that is that ladies not only consider themselves privileged to change their minds, but avail themselves of the privilege as they feel inclined, without the least consideration for the feelings of others.’

‘I have never changed my mind with regard to you, Sir Arthur,’ said Regina Nettleship, calmly, ‘and I hope Mr. Chase-more will take my word for it. I have never even made it up. But your present action has decided me. We shall never be more than acquaintances for the future!’

‘Vivian, if you are ready I think we will take our departure!’ said the baronet, curtly; ‘Miss Nettleship will evidently be relieved by our absence.’

‘I cannot go until I have asked this lady’s pardon for any unpleasantness of which *I* may have been the unfortunate cause,’ replied Vivian.

‘There is no need, Mr. Chasemore, I can assure you. I have told your cousin nothing but what he should have known before, and I hope you will consider that my offer to him of friendship in the future extends also to yourself.’

‘I shall be but too proud to be numbered amongst Miss Nettleship’s acquaintances.’

‘Mamma will be so sorry to have missed you,’ went on Regina, sweetly. ‘She will not be satisfied until she has seen you. I hope you will soon call again to be introduced to her.’

‘ I shall be most happy !’

He shook the hand which she extended to him as he spoke ; but Sir Arthur contented himself with a formal bow, as he hurried from her presence with a heart burning with rage and mortification. It was bitter to be rejected by Regina Nettleship ; and doubly so to have received his dismissal in the presence of his newly-returned cousin.



CHAPTER VIII.

‘HE MUST BE A GENEROUS YOUNG MAN.’

THE two men got into a cab together, and the order was given to drive to the hotel where Vivian was staying.

‘You’ll dine with me to-day, old fellow, won’t you?’ he had said first to Sir Arthur. For he felt the slight to which his cousin had been subjected, and was desirous to set him as much at his ease as possible.

‘Oh yes, if you like it,’ replied the baronet, carelessly—‘as well there as anywhere;’ and then he added something in a lower voice that was not complimentary to Miss Nettleship or her sex.

‘Try and forget all about it,’ was Vivian’s consoling rejoinder. ‘Women are riddles at the best. I don’t wonder at our sometimes making mistakes about them, though I can sympathise with you on losing such a girl as that? She’s like a statue. By Jove! Arthur,’ he went on suddenly, ‘I’ve left that unlucky bracelet behind me again.’

‘Have you? That’s a pity! What shall you do about it?’

‘Nothing! She’s sure to mention it when we meet.’

‘Oh! you mean to keep up the acquaintance, then?’

‘Why not? Miss Nettleship expressly invited me to do so. Didn’t you hear her?’

‘Yes; but, under the circumstances, I thought perhaps it might not be agreeable to you.’

‘Hang it all! my dear Arthur, I can’t be expected to drop a pretty girl because she

doesn't feel inclined to marry you. I hope you don't consider that such an act of prosaic virtue ought to come into the category of my cousinly duties.'

'No! of course not; and I am sure you or any other man is welcome to her friendship. You'll never get anything more out of her. She's as cold as an icicle, and as proud as Juno.'

"If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?"

laughed Vivian as the hansom cab drew up at the door of the hotel, and Sir Arthur and he disappeared within its portals.

Meanwhile Regina stood where they had left her, wondering if she had acted for the best; but quite sure that she could not have acted otherwise. A single admission of Sir Arthur's supposed claims would have been fatal to her. She was a little sorry for him.

He was certainly very nice-looking, and apparently fond of her; and if he had only had the money, she would not have hesitated to accept him. But what was his income?—positively nothing. A miserable five thousand pounds, out at interest probably at five per cent., and the possible gains of a barren profession! Why, her mother had as much money as that, and yet how they were obliged to economise. Regina shuddered as she looked round the uncomfortable room she stood in, and thought of being condemned to stay in one like it all her life. Sir Arthur's title was something in the scale, certainly, and she wished—oh, so ardently!—that Vivian Chasemore had only inherited it instead; but it was an impossibility and no use thinking of. Vivian's really handsome face and figure she valued little. They added to his attractions, certainly, but without the money they

would have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. But the next question was, whether Vivian Chasemore would consider her birth and beauty as an equivalent for his fifty thousand pounds? If his heart were only free, and not entangled with some low person in the profession he had left, Regina believed he would. She knew how to come down from her throne and be more of a woman and less of a statue, when the occasion demanded ; and she knew also the effect she could produce by such a condescension.

As she pondered thus, her eye fell on the white sealed packet that had caused her so openly to speak her mind. In the hurry of departure Vivian had left it behind him. At first, the circumstance gave her annoyance, until she remembered that he must come back again to fetch it, or it would form a good excuse for her to recall him if he did not. So she took it in her hands and went

up to her mother's bedroom. She had not told Lady William anything yet of her interviews with Sir Arthur Chasemore, but she thought the time had come to disclose them. She had refused him, as her mother had advised her to do, and she did not care who heard of it. The presence of Mrs. Runnymede only added a zest to her female love of communicating a piece of news.

The whole story was gone through, with the omission, of course, of such details as Regina considered disadvantageous to herself, and the two old ladies were delighted with it. Mrs. Runnymede put in a few expressions of compassion and sympathy for Sir Arthur in the disappointment he must have sustained; but Lady William's head shook with excitement and pleasure at hearing that her daughter had behaved so discreetly, and she reminded Mrs. Runnymede rather sharply that this was not the

first young man Regina had rejected in marriage, and it was not to be supposed that the granddaughter of the Duke of Mudford was going to throw herself away upon a beggarly baronet, without even sufficient money to keep up the title.

‘And so Vivian Chasemore is good-looking, Runnymede tells me,’ continued Lady William, who, divested of her rouge and false hair, and clad in a flannel dressing-gown, was anything but good-looking herself. ‘He certainly has lost no time in calling upon us.’

‘Oh! that was in consequence of the presumption of Sir Arthur, mamma, who actually made so sure I intended to accept him, that he invited his cousin to come and offer his congratulations. And here is the packet Mr. Chasemore bought for my acceptance. He left it on the table by mistake.’

‘Perhaps it was not by mistake,’ suggested Mrs. Runnymede.

‘It could hardly have been done intentionally, after what I said to him,’ replied Regina, in the unpleasantly sarcastic tone in which she usually addressed her mother’s friend. ‘Mr. Vivian Chasemore did not look as if he relished the rebuff which his cousin received sufficiently to run the risk of encountering another on his own account.’

‘It is quite a weighty parcel,’ remarked Lady William, as she balanced it in her hands. ‘I should like to see its contents.’

‘Nothing easier,’ suggested Mrs. Runnymede; ‘the paper is only sealed down with wax at the corners. I could open and do it up again so that no one could detect the difference.’

‘What do you say, Regina? I should like to have a peep, if only to form some idea of Mr. Vivian Chasemore’s character. I

think men's minds are so often to be read in their purchases.'

'I see no harm in opening the packet, mamma, if it is carefully re-sealed. I shouldn't like Mr. Chasemore to think we had tampered with it.'

'Of course not! We will take care of that. Hand me those scissors off the dressing table, Regina.'

Regina gave Lady William what she asked for. She was not usually so complaisant, but she was curious herself to see what the packet contained.

Lady William took off the outer wrappings with the greatest care, when a morocco case was brought to view, which being opened, displayed a beautiful bracelet of chased gold, with a large star of pearls and diamonds in the centre.

The two elder women went into ecstasies over the jewelled toy.

‘He *must* be a generous young man,’ exclaimed Lady William, ‘to make such a purchase as this for his cousin’s *fiancée*! Why, it must have cost fifty pounds, at the very least.’

‘Fifty pounds, my dear Lady William! Much more like one hundred, I can assure you. Those are whole pearls, and the diamonds are brilliants. It quite makes my mouth water!’

‘And you should have seen the trumpery ring Sir Arthur wanted me to accept to-day, mamma,’ said Regina. ‘A schoolgirl’s trinket, that I would not have been seen with on my finger.’

‘Ah, my dear, that young man has to be taught his place. Perhaps the lesson you have given him will be very useful. His cousin appears to be cast in a totally different mould.’

‘He does indeed,’ murmured Mrs. Runny-

mede. 'Miss Nettleship, this bracelet is most artistic! Does it not make you feel quite miserable to have refused it?'

'Not when I remember the supposition on which it was bought for me. Pray do it up again very carefully, Mrs. Runnymede. I expect Mr. Chasemore will call here to-morrow or the next day.'

The morocco case was returned to its paper wrappings, and the seals secured as before. Then Mrs. Runnymede suddenly remembered she could not stay a minute later, as she had an engagement with Mrs. Macdougall for that very evening.

'I know the cause of that hasty departure,' said Regina, as their friend turned her back upon them; 'she wants to tell the whole story of Sir Arthur's rejection and Mr. Chasemore's bracelet to that other old scandal-monger, the Macdougall of Macdougall.'

‘Were you wise to say so much before her?’

‘I really don’t know, and I don’t care! It is sure to get round to Selina Farthingale’s ears by their means, and I should like her to know that I’ve refused Sir Arthur, because she is so very anxious to get him for herself. She may do it now, and welcome!’

‘Ah! you see I was right, my dear,’ said Lady William, oracularly; ‘and I am thankful you have taken my advice. I tremble to think what might have happened if Mr. Chasemore’s recovery had been delayed for a month or two. You might have been married to Sir Arthur before he arrived.’

‘I don’t think so. But you mustn’t make too sure of Vivian Chasemore, mamma. All we know is, that he is here. He may be engaged, or even married, for aught we have heard to the contrary.’

But Lady William's faith was not to be shaken.

'No, my dear ; no !' she answered. 'A married man—or even an engaged man—would not have brought that bracelet for a perfect stranger. He would have been thinking of his house and his furniture and his wife's dresses instead. Vivian Chase-more is too extravagant to be anything but a bachelor and heart-whole. When did he say he was coming again ?'

'He mentioned no particular time. He only said he should have pleasure in doing so.'

'You must write to him, Regina, in my name, and ask him to dine with us on Thursday. Farthingale will forward the letter, and Mèringue can send in the dinner. Something very simple, you know : a roast chicken and a little oyster soup. Young men who can get everything they want are

never particular about their eating. Mr. Chase-
more has not had time to make any friends
in London, and the sooner we are in the field
the better. Do you understand me ?

‘ Perfectly, mamma ! And shall I mention
the bracelet ?’

‘ Yes ! say you will keep it safely for him
till he comes. I dare say he will try and
persuade you to retain it ; but you must
refuse the offer, at all risks.’

‘ Of course I shall, mamma ! Do you
think I should be so foolish as to let him
imagine I accept presents from strangers ?
It will not even do to let him suppose such a
gift would be of any value to me. By the
way, that reminds me that I ought to have a
new dress. I really have not a decent one
to walk in the Park or anywhere. And if
there is one thing above another that
frightens rich men away, it is genteel
poverty.’

‘Well, well, we will see about that after Thursday. I shall be better able to judge then what the young man’s intentions are likely to be. Write that note, Regina, and send it by to-night’s post. Lay it all on me! Say I knew his father when a boy, and am desirous to see him in consequence. And write in a friendly manner. When a man has no decent acquaintances, he is touched by a little cordiality from strangers.’

So the note was written and sent, and Vivian Chasemore, ‘touched by the cordiality from strangers,’ accepted the invitation it contained with gratitude.

Meanwhile Mrs. Runnymede ‘dropped in’ at the Macdougals’ house in Hans Place, and was fortunate enough to find Selina Farthingale there. For this young lady was a great favourite with the old Scotchwoman, who had the power to introduce her into good society, and upon whom she fawned, when occasion

demanded it, to a sickening extent. She was spending the evening with her now on her own invitation, having left Miss Janet Oppenheim at home *sans cérémonie*, as her father advised her to do.

Every detail relating to the runaway hat and the lost packet; the refusal of the baronet and the purchase of the bracelet, was repeated again and again by Mrs. Runnymede for the benefit of her hearers, whilst the Macdougals' eyeballs protruded with curiosity, and Selina turned sick at heart at the intelligence of her rival's success.

'Are you *sure* he proposed to her?' demanded the Macdougals.

'Well, of course I have only her word for it.'

'*Her waird!*' repeated the other, with a sneer; 'why, my dear, that girl is hairdened enough to say *anything*. The way in which she went on with that young man the other

night at the Stingoes' was a disgreece—a pairfect disgreece! All I can say is, that if she has refused him after it, she ought to be ashamed of herself.'

'It would take a great deal to make Regina Nettleship that,' rejoined Mrs. Runnymede; 'she's as stuck-up and proud as she can be. You should have seen the air with which she told us the story. You would have thought Sir Arthur wasn't good enough for a door-mat for her.'

'I don't believe he ever proposed to her at all,' said Selina, who had great difficulty in keeping back her tears of vexation. 'I'm sure she would have taken him if he had. They are as poor as church rats, papa says, and anybody can see how they dress. Do you suppose Miss Regina wouldn't be "my lady" if she could?'

'Ah, my dear! but you forget the other young man has come in the way. She's got

her eye fixed on *him* now! I wish you could have seen that bracelet! There's no mistake about *that*! It must have cost one hundred pounds at least!

'A fool and his money are soon parted!' chimed in the Macdougal, to whose charge the fault of reckless extravagance could never have been laid. 'I have nae doubt Miss Nettleship will take as many presents as Mr. Chasemore is silly enough to buy for her! There is something about that young woman that I never could stand.'

'He'd better buy her some new dresses whilst he is about it,' remarked Selina, spitefully; and then she went home, half-crying, to tell the news to her father, and was surprised and offended to find that he laughed at instead of commiserating her.

'One would think you had no feeling for your own flesh and blood, papa! And when

you know how I've set my heart upon that man !'

'That's the very reason I am laughing, my dear. You are too prejudiced to be able to judge in the matter. But this is the very best thing that could have happened for you.'

'What do you mean? How can Sir Arthur being in love with Regina Nettleship forward my cause?'

'Tut, tut, tut! You girls think of nothing but love. A man may have a dozen reasons for proposing to a woman without having any love for her at all. He may admire her, or her family, or he may have been drawn into making her an offer before he knew what he was about.'

'That's just it, papa, I believe,' said Selina, eagerly; 'she's a horrid flirt, you know, and she has led him on until he had no means of backing out of it with honour.'

‘All the better for you, Selina. A heart is often caught in the rebound. Sir Arthur’s vanity has doubtless been wounded. It must be your part to apply the salve.’

‘But perhaps he won’t come near us now!’

‘Oh yes, he will! He has not many more friends at this end of London than his cousin. Until he came into his title he was always cooped up in chambers. We will invite him to some nice dinners, and make him thoroughly comfortable here, and he’ll come as often as we ask him.’

‘Suppose he is really in love with her, papa.’

‘That won’t make any difference! If he had reason to believe she would accept him, he will be all the readier to show her he is not mortally hurt by her refusal. But you must go to work very carefully, Selina. Don’t frighten him. You women are much

too quick sometimes. You leave the gentleman to me.'

'What can you do, papa?'

'Never you mind! I can pay for the dinners, at all events, and all you have to do is to order them. And when I see he is in a proper mood for it, I can easily let him know that my daughter will not go penniless to her husband. Sir Arthur is seriously perplexed about money, Selina. He doesn't get on in the profession a bit. But if he were my son-in-law, I should be able to get him no end of work. Do you see?'

'But I want him to love me for myself,' said Selina, who had really fixed her affections on the unconscious baronet.

'Phew! Nonsense! That's how you girls spoil sport! Of course he'll love you for yourself when the matter's settled, but a man's first consideration is the state of the

coffer. A wife is an expensive article nowadays, Selina, and you'll go off all the sooner and better because your old dad has managed to collect a few halfpence for you. By the way, that reminds me, how are you getting on with Janet Oppenheim ?

'Oh ! very well, papa ! She keeps her place and is not at all intrusive.'

'You have not discovered how much she knows of her money matters ?'

'I do not think she knows anything. She always alludes to herself as very poor. She picked up some old trimming I had thrown away yesterday, and washed it, and did it up again for her own use.'

'That is well ! and you must encourage the idea, for I'm afraid the old lady's affairs are in a bit of a muddle, and I can't afford to part with loose cash just now when I may want it at any time—eh ! Selina ?'

Miss Selina blushed and looked as modest

as if the baronet had proposed to her that day instead of to Regina. The father and daughter were a well-matched pair, and she had great faith in his powers of generalship.

‘I understand, papa, and I don’t think Janet will be any trouble to us. I find her most useful. She is always ready to assist me in any way, and very clever with her needle.’

‘Well! I’m glad you agree. Women seldom do. It’s lucky there’s no man to come between you. There’d be an end to your friendship then.’

‘I should think Janet Oppenheim would know her position better than to attempt to cross my path in any way,’ replied Selina, grandly; and then she added, descending to more mundane matters: ‘For what day shall I invite Sir Arthur first, papa?’

‘Let me see! To-morrow I go to Guildford,

and the next day I have to meet Raddles. Shall we say Thursday, Selina? Thursday will be as good a day as any, and give the man a little time to get over the unpleasantness he seems to have encountered to-day.'

And so it came to pass that the two cousins were unwarily drawn into the net on the same day. Vivian to dine with Lady William Nettleship's daughter, and Sir Arthur with the daughter of Rufus Farthingale. Decoyed, it is true, and into the very jaws of danger, but it remains to be seen if either of them were caught.

Miss Janet Oppenheim went into her usual state of fervent enthusiasm when she was told that the baronet was to be their guest on Thursday.

'Oh! dear Miss Farthingale, how much I shall admire him! I feel it even before we meet. He will have no eyes for *me*, of course; but I shall sit like a quiet little

mouse and watch all your happiness, and be so proud if you find time to tell him that you look upon me as your little friend.'

Miss Oppenheim was not particularly small, but she always spoke of herself as though she were the tiniest thing in creation.

Selina promised that she would give an excellent character of her to their guest, and added in a condescending manner that she mustn't be frightened at Sir Arthur, who was really of a most gracious disposition, and sure to be well-disposed towards any one who was a friend of her father's and herself. On the Thursday in question, however, when Selina was momentarily expecting the advent of their visitor, she was rather startled at seeing Miss Oppenheim enter the room looking better than she had ever done before. A black velvet dress, made perfectly plain, but with a train that swept a yard on the ground behind, set off the girl's

extreme fairness to its best advantage, and lent her figure a dignity which it had wanted hitherto.

‘You need not have dressed up like that,’ observed Selina, sharply. ‘There is no one but Sir Arthur coming! It is not a dinner party.’

‘I know it, dear Miss Farthingale,’ was the meek rejoinder; ‘but I thought it was but respectful to any guest of yours, to appear as neatly attired as it is in my power to do.’

Selina had no opportunity of answering again, as at that moment Sir Arthur entered the room.

Whilst about the same time Vivian Chasemore dashed up in a hansom to the door of Lady William’s apartments.



CHAPTER IX.

‘HE PROPOSED THIS EVENING.’

You may be sure that Regina was ready to receive him, dressed in her best, or rather in her most becoming costume. For the taste of this young lady, although she was so poor, was very fastidious. It was not in her power to wear finery of the best description, and therefore she wore none at all. But she looked like a lily on its straight and slender stem in her plain black dress, just artfully cut away to display the moulded throat and rounded arms, and made without any trimming, except the soft lace that she

had washed and quilled with her own hands. There had been quite a battle-royal between her mother and herself before she descended to the drawing-room that evening. Regina had entered Lady William's bedroom, and detected her in the act of anointing and powdering her face with even more lavish generosity than usual.

'Mamma,' the girl exclaimed, 'what an extraordinary delusion it is, on your part, to imagine that you do all you can to advance my prospects in the matrimonial market!'

'What do you mean?' demanded Lady William, with the powder-puff suspended in its operations.

'Why, you say you want me to captivate Vivian Chasemore, and you are doing the very thing to drive him from us.'

'I do not understand you, Regina.'

'Do you think, mamma, that a man who

has spent the last four years of his life upon the stage, and been in the nightly habit of seeing women painted and powdered to their eyes, is likely to appreciate such a very bad imitation of the professional process as you are about to give him ?'

'Really, Regina, your language to me is unbearable,' cried Lady William, who was most sensitive on the score of any allusion being made to her painting propensities, although she 'made-up' so badly that an infant might have detected the imposture. 'After all I have done for you—after the sacrifices I have made, and the inconveniences I have suffered for your sake, to be spoken to in this coarse manner is *too* much—quite, *quite* too much!' and Lady William stuck her powder-puff into her eye, under the mistake that it was her pocket-handkerchief, so overcome was she by the conduct of her daughter.

‘ Now, mamma ! don’t make a fuss about it ! we all know you paint—who could help knowing it ?—but I wish you’d do it with moderation for this one evening. If your object in asking Mr. Chasemore here is to secure him for a son-in-law, I feel quite sure he would prefer to see you as you are, than with any amount of rouge on.’

‘ *Rouge !*’ almost screamed Lady William. ‘ You wicked, cruel girl ! to mention such a thing to me, when you know the extent of what I use is a little violet powder to prevent the spraying of my skin !’

Regina did not know anything of the kind, but it was to her interest to pretend to do so.

‘ Of course, mamma ! But don’t put on even the violet powder to-night. I am sure Mr. Chasemore will prefer simplicity and ingenuousness to any amount of meretricious attraction. It will only be for a little while,

you know. We can do as we like when matters are settled, and we see our way more plainly before us.'


'*Meretricious!*' repeated her mother, as she rose and walked to the washing-stand. 'That I should have lived to hear such a term applied to me by my own flesh and blood. Will *that* please you, Miss Nettleship?' she continued viciously, as she sponged every remnant of rouge and powder from her face with warm water and dried it carefully with the towel.

'Oh yes, mamma! You look ten times nicer now,' replied Regina, complacently, as she regarded the reflection of her own fair neck and arms in the looking-glass. Poor Lady William's skin was like a wrinkled glove now that the creases were no longer filled with paste and powder, and yet it is doubtful if her daughter's words were not true.

Old age, however ugly, is always rendered worse by those artificial adornments which even the smoothest flesh can scarcely bear with impunity. Regina greatly preferred that her mother should appear like a yellow mummy to Vivian Chasemore, than with white and red cheeks. She was not afraid of any unfavourable comparisons being established between them, for she did not resemble her maternal parent in any degree, but took after her fair-haired, handsome, rollicking father, who had run through his constitution and his patrimony in the first few years of married life, and left his widow and child to drag through the world as best they might, on the small pittance which had formed his wife's settlement.

Regina may have been contented, therefore, but Lady William was anything but pleased. Her daughter was subjected to a very severe lecture on ingratitude and want

of filial respect before she was permitted to descend to the drawing-room, and it was only the opportune arrival of Vivian Chase-more's cab that enabled her to effect her escape. But she exhibited no traces of the warfare she had passed through as she welcomed him, calmly and gracefully, to her mother's dwelling. To Vivian, who had been thrown so much amongst a class inferior to his own, she appeared the very incarnation of good breeding and birth. It has been already said that this young man had never felt himself at home in the profession he had adopted for his support. He had been born for better things. Although he was headstrong, impulsive and passionate he was not intended by nature for dissipation in any of its lower forms. Coarseness, ribaldry, and debauchery he revolted from, and intimate association with his inferiors, however good and kind they might be, had



never had the power to please him. He could be grateful to them for their goodness—he often had been—yet he shrank from their intimate society.

Consequently, he had lived much alone, with leisure to nurse his own dreams of a future which he had never expected to see realised. He had been too young when he left his home to know much about women. Those whom he had seen since had not, as a rule, realised his conceptions of what the sex should be. There are women upon the stage at the present day who are ladies both by birth and education, but they are few and far between, and keep much to themselves, jealously guarded by their mothers or their husbands. With such, Vivian had not had the good fortune to be associated; and the girls who had played upon the stage with him, and hung about the green-rooms, talking, laughing, and flirting with half-a-dozen

different men every evening, had lowered, rather than raised, his ideal of womanhood. Indeed, at the moment that Mr. Farthingale had surprised him upon the first floor of Mrs. Bell's apartments, Vivian had begun to look upon the other sex not as inferior to his own, perhaps, but certainly as upon something that had been created to be petted and caressed when good, and taken to task when naughty, and never to be held accountable for the execution of any folly when left to its own devices.

Upon such a man, accustomed to the sound of bad grammar, and sometimes bad words—to the sight of false hair, painted lips, and flaunting finery, the appearance of Regina Nettleship had much the same effect as the pure cool dew of morning might have had after a night of bad gas, bad liquor, and dirty cards.

She looked so reticent and modest as she

tendered him her hand. Her pale clear complexion had surely never known the use of rouge or powder ; indeed, he doubted if she was even acquainted with the name of those odious cosmetics. Regina knew them well enough, as we are aware, and had used them too, sometimes—just a *souffçon* at the opera or at an evening party, to heighten the effect of her eyes—but she always did it so delicately that she defied detection, and had never admitted the fact even to her mamma.

Then, her dress was so neat and simple, without a single ribbon or flower ; and her pale gold hair was so exquisitely arranged, like the classic heads of the Olympian goddesses. Vivian only saw the outside of Miss Nettleship, and he gave her credit for possessing all the good qualities which her exterior seemed to indicate. Even Lady William's palsied and forbidding countenance was powerless to detract from her daughter's

charms. He saw how unlike they were, and felt no fear that Regina's old age should in anywise resemble her mother's. He passed what seemed a delightful evening with his new acquaintances. The dinner was very simple, but everything was well cooked, and no apology (that most certain sign of want of good breeding) was made for the poverty of the repast. A few flowers bloomed in a bowl in the centre of the table, and as they left it Regina took a damask rose and fastened it into the front of her dress. How it scented the atmosphere as it nestled amongst the lace that encircled her throat, and fell and rose with the pulsations of her snowy bosom, as Vivian sat close by her after dinner and talked about his past life. Lady William had been wise enough to ask the Macdougals to join their party, for she foresaw that without some such aid Regina would be unable to say a word alone

to Mr. Chasemore, and she trusted to her daughter's strategy too well not to know that, given the opportunity, she would make good use of it. The Macdougal, although one of Lady William's bitterest foes behind her back, was, after the fashion of female friends in this dear innocent city of London, only too ready to eat her dinners or suppers when she had nothing better in prospect.

So the old women retreated to the back drawing-room to talk such scandal as might seem good to them, whilst Vivian and Regina ensconced themselves in two low chairs at the open window in front, and looked through the lace curtains at the carriages and pedestrians still lingering in the Park.

'Sensible people,' quoth Vivian, 'to be bold enough to enjoy the best part of the day, instead of shutting themselves up in hot rooms or hotter theatres on such a warm

night as this. Do you not think so, Miss Nettleship ?’

‘Oh yes ! I perfectly agree with you,’ replied Regina. (No one cared less for nightingales and moonshine than she did, or loved crowded rooms and small talk more, but it would have been very bad generalship to say so.) ‘If I had a carriage,’ with a little laugh at the absurdity of the idea, ‘I should use it to drive away into the beautiful country, and see the fields and the flowers, and the dear little cottage children.’

‘You love the country, then ?’

‘Oh yes, I think so. I have never lived in it, you know,’ said Regina, with a sudden amendment, in case Mr. Chasemore had a decided aversion in that direction. ‘My grandpapa, Lord Mudford, has a beautiful estate in Gloucestershire. I believe it is a perfect paradise, but we have nothing to do with that, you see. Poor papa was only the

sixth son. It was hardly to be supposed he could be rich.'

'Indeed no ! With your simple tastes, Miss Nettleship, I suppose it is useless to inquire if you care for the theatre ?'

How she wished an angel would suddenly appear and reveal to her what he thought upon the subject himself. He would hardly have adopted the stage if he had not liked the profession, but at the same time he might have grown heartily sick of everything connected with it. She felt compelled, in betting parlance, to 'hedge'—and no one could do that more naturally than Regina Nettleship.

'It so entirely depends upon the actors, Mr. Chasemore, and the play.'

'True ; but you have all the best talent at your very doors in London.'

'Yet we go so seldom that perhaps I have not had sufficient experience to be able to judge of my own feelings on the subject.

Mamma is a great invalid, you know' (she could not possibly err in making a point of filial duty, Regina thought); 'and of course I never leave her. But I have spent some very pleasant evenings at the theatre, with friends whom I liked. Everything depends so much on the people you are with, does it not?'

'Indeed it does. But I feel sure your intellect must respond to the expositions of some of the great actors and actresses we have upon the stage at present. To Irving, for instance, and Ellen Terry, and the Kendals and Bancrofts. I could name a dozen others, but I think the art of these very womanly women must appeal forcibly to their own sex.'

'Oh yes. But is not the reason of that because they choose such sweet and innocent parts, and act them so naturally that they appear like nature? Which brings us back

to my first conclusion, that the best part of life must be that which is natural and good ; and therefore the flowers and sunshine and the birds and children appeal to the highest senses which we possess.'

Vivian was enchanted with this speech, although it did not entirely coincide with his own sentiments. He had never heard anything like it from the lips of a woman before, and it expressed the very feelings that he associated with innocence and purity. How could he tell that in poor Bonnie's rough, untutored mind there existed higher and purer ideas than had ever entered (or ever would enter) into that of Regina Nettleship ? He looked at the delicately-cut features, at the shapely outline. He listened to the softly-enunciated syllables—the perfect pronunciation, and he believed, without a single doubt, that the speaker's words were but a reflection of her soul. Is he the first man who has

been entrapped by similar means to mistake coldness for purity, and self-command for want of guile ?

He left the little house in Knightsbridge that evening, fully persuaded that Miss Nettleship was one of the most charming women he had ever met, and his cousin the unluckiest of men. Not that he was in the least surprised, now that he had talked familiarly with her, that she had rejected the idea of being Sir Arthur's wife with scorn. She was a thousand times too good for him : Arthur was not intellectual. He had the most commonplace ideas on all subjects ; and was it likely that a girl like Regina Nettleship, who lived in a beautiful world of her own, far above the sordid everyday lives of her mercenary fellow-creatures, should have stooped to assimilate herself with a man who thought of little else but his dinner and his clothes. She had hinted as much to Vivian

in the most delicate manner in the world, as she placed the parcel containing the bracelet in his hands.

‘This unlucky bracelet!’ he had exclaimed on that occasion. ‘How I wish I had lost it altogether! It reminds me of the discomfiture of our first meeting. What a fool I must have looked in your eyes, Miss Nettle-ship!’

‘Oh, pray don’t say that! The mistake was unfortunate, I own; but I shall *never* forget the generosity which prompted you to please Sir Arthur by the purchase.’

‘He entirely misled me.’

‘He did indeed! And he entirely misled himself into the bargain.’

‘I suppose his wish was father to the thought,’ returned Vivian, with an upward glance; ‘and I do not wonder at it. Poor wretch! he has paid dearly for his presumption.’

‘Mr. Chasemore, I want you to believe that it *was* presumption,’ said Regina, sweetly. ‘I should not have mentioned the subject, if you had not introduced it; but since you have, let me tell you that Sir Arthur had no reason to believe I should accept his offer. He thought doubtless that he was too good a match for a penniless girl to refuse; but he did not know that——’

‘What is it that he did not know?’ demanded Vivian, with interest.

‘That I look for something higher in marriage than for a man to feed me and clothe me and keep a roof over my head. Sir Arthur is very good-looking and pleasant; but my husband (if I ever have one) must be my intellectual superior as well as my friend.’

‘That is just it,’ Vivian thought, as he strolled homewards to his hotel. ‘Arthur is not half good enough for a girl like that! She wants a man who is well-read and well-

informed, and has sufficient brain to appreciate his own education. Arthur is wrapped up in his law-books, and is about as prosaic as a creature can well be. He has not the least atom of poetry in his composition. He would have wearied a girl with Miss Nettleship's tastes in a month.'

And without exactly deciding that his own liking for those subjects on which his cousin fell short would render him a more desirable companion in Regina's eyes, Mr. Vivian Chasemore was certainly better inclined towards himself and life in general, as he turned into bed that night, than he had been for some time previously.

He had not left Lady William and her daughter without receiving a cordial invitation from the elder lady to come and see them again. He reminded her so pleasantly, she averred, of his poor dear father, who had been a flame of hers in her maiden days; and

that she had never seen General Chasemore during her lifetime, and that Vivian did not in the slightest degree resemble him, was not the least obstacle to the interchange of compliments between these two worldlings. Vivian was flattered by the interest shown in him by both ladies, and pleased to secure the opportunity of seeing more of the younger one. Her statuesque and passionless beauty had first attracted him; her reserved and apparently unapproachable manner drew him on still further, and the idea of succeeding where Sir Arthur had failed was no slight element in strengthening his wish to improve the acquaintance. How many of us, I wonder, value our victories solely on account of the honour we gain by them? How many would struggle to succeed, unless a crowd stood by to cheer the conqueror, and one or two hearts were filled with bitter envy at our success? Vivian was

no better and no worse than the rest of the world. He took a wicked pleasure in letting his cousin know, in a casual manner, how many times in the week he had been at Lady William's apartments, or accompanied the ladies in their afternoon drive in a hack brougham which was occasionally hired for their convenience.

'Oh, you are keeping up that acquaintance then!' Sir Arthur had once remarked with apparent indifference, though in reality with jealous heartburning, as he listened to Vivian's account of an evening spent with Lady William and her daughter at the Italian Opera, although the latter forgot to add that he had presented the box for their acceptance.

'Yes! Why should I not?' replied his cousin, in much the same words as he had answered the same query on the day of Sir Arthur's rejection. 'You are not such a dog

in the manger, my dear fellow, surely, as to object to my knowing your friends because you happen to have dropped them! Why don't you go there yourself sometimes? I can assure you that Regina—I mean Miss Nettleship—bears you no enmity. She often asks after your health, and, if I remember rightly, on the day you made that unfortunate little mistake, she said she hoped you would continue to be friends.'

'Oh yes; I dare say! Be friends with a girl who misled me in so disgraceful a manner. I suppose she wants to whistle me back again, now that I am gone! But she should have taken the chance whilst it was in her power. I shall not visit there again in a hurry.'

'It's your loss,' replied Vivian coolly, although he felt very much inclined to give Sir Arthur a piece of his mind, on the subject. 'But as for wishing to "whistle

you back," that's all nonsense. Miss Nettle-ship refused your advances most decidedly, and in my presence. There is no getting out of that. Besides, it is rumoured all over town that you are paying your addresses to Miss Farthingale. Haven't you heard it ?

'Neither heard it, nor done it, nor mean to do it; so you may contradict the report whenever it reaches you. Selina Farthingale indeed! A beetle-browed old maid with a yellow skin! Thank you for the compliment, Vivian; but I hope I've got rather better taste than that.'

'Oh, my dear fellow, I'm not answerable for the treason!' cried his cousin, laughing. 'I have thought old Farthingale's money-bags might have some attraction for you; and if they were inseparably coupled with the beetle-browed daughter—the gilding to his black pill—*que voudriez-vous*? A man is sometimes left no choice in these matters.

Still the bags would have to be filled to the very brim for me.'

'There is no truth whatever in the story,' repeated Sir Arthur, 'though the money would be acceptable enough. But the lady is not to my taste.'

He might have added that the hopes he had entertained with regard to Regina Nettleship had rendered Miss Farthingale still more displeasing to him than she would otherwise have been. But some intuition made him hold his tongue. He had already begun to suspect that Vivian might end by taking the citadel which had refused to succumb to him. And the thought made him very bitter.

For one—two months Vivian Chasemore continued to come and go at Lady William Nettleship's. He was acquainted by that time with numerous good families, and was a welcome guest at many houses. The

Stingoes had opened their hospitable doors to him ; Mrs. Macdougall of Macdougall had screwed him out more than one dinner ; the Farthingales had *fêted* the rightful heir ; and the smaller fry of Runnymedes and parasites of that kin had worshipped the ground he trod on. He was member of two or three fashionable clubs ; had a smart set of chambers and a *valet-de-chambre* in the Albany ; and drove a pair of the handsomest chestnuts in town. The season ran on, with its wealth of dinners, suppers, balls, and card-parties ; yet, though Vivian was overwhelmed with invitations of all sorts, and had scarcely a spare moment to call his own, very few afternoons passed without his finding the time to call at the little house in Knightsbridge, if it were only to leave a bouquet of flowers or a couple of stalls for the opera, or to inquire after the health of Lady William and her daughter. On several evenings he presented himself at

their rooms, modestly though without invitation, to crave permission to seek refuge from the glare and the bustle of his outside life in the cool and the shade of the lace-curtained drawing-room. And those evenings were always spent close by Regina's side—sometimes *tête-à-tête* with her—discussing their mutual tastes, social and intellectual, and finding with each fresh interview how marvelously well their views agreed upon every topic of importance. All this familiar intercourse and interchange of thought had its due effect upon an impressionable young man of five-and-twenty, who was free to make his choice in marriage, and indulge it as soon as convenient. So that towards the close of the London season, and just as Lady William was wondering whether it was not her duty as a mother to give Vivian Chasemore a lift over the barrier of uncertainty which stood between himself and her daughter, she was

not in the least surprised, though very much gratified, to hear Regina say, as if it were the most unimportant thing in the world :

‘It is all right, mamma ! He proposed this evening, and we intend to be married the first week in September.’



CHAPTER X.

‘SETTLEMENTS.’

REGINA had conveyed this piece of news to her mother's bedroom, whither Lady William had retired rather earlier than usual, leaving her daughter to make the last adieux to Mr. Vivian Chasemore under the romantic cover of the moonlighted balcony. She had never been effusive in her demonstrations of affection for Regina, but the knowledge that she stood on the threshold of becoming the possessor of fifty thousand pounds was too much for Lady William's maternal feelings.

‘Oh, my precious child!’ she exclaimed.

‘ My sweet, *sweet* girl ! is it really the case ? Of course I knew it must be coming ; but to hear that you and dear Mr. Chasemore have arrived at an understanding at last, is indeed good news. And to be married in September, too ; scarcely a month hence ! And naturally he will make a handsome settlement upon you. It would be an unheard-of thing if he did not.’

Regina stood by the dressing-table whilst her mother was pouring these congratulations upon her, with something very like a sneer upon her face. She loved money and the luxuries it procured for their own sake, but she despised the proffers of affection and friendship which she had known beforehand would spring up in every direction as soon as she obtained it.

‘ Do you think it likely, mamma, that as soon as the man asked me to be his wife, I sprang at him to ascertain what settlement

he intended to make? Of course Mr. Chasemore will do all that is necessary or usual on such occasions; but I should be a fool to make him cry off his bargain by appearing too eager and grasping.'

'Well, perhaps you are right, Regina. You are a very sensible girl, my dear, and a great credit to your mother's rearing. But now tell me all about it: what he said, and how he looked, and the answer you gave him.'

'He said very little, and he looked much the same as usual, and I answered "Yes."'

'Really, Regina, you are enough to provoke a saint! My only child, too, and when you must know how anxious I feel.'

'Well, mamma! I suppose I must indulge your feminine curiosity. We were standing by the window together when the elastic that strings my jet bracelet broke—in fact, to tell you the truth, I broke it on purpose,

to give him the opportunity to fasten it round my arm again. He's absurdly bashful.'

'Yes—yes, dear! I quite understand! go on!' cried Lady William, eagerly.

'He picked up the beads, and I restrung them, and asked him to tie them on. He held my wrist in his hand for a moment, and said he wished he could see the bracelet he had bought for me on it. I replied that was quite impossible, and you would never allow me to accept so handsome a present from any gentleman—unless he were my *fiancé*. Then all the rest came easy, you know.'

'Of course, but let me hear it, dear.'

'How childish you are, mamma. A baby might guess what followed. He asked me if I would take it from my *fiancé*—if I would take it from him! I replied, "But we are *not fiancés*, Mr. Chasemore;" and he said,

"Let us be so then, Regina—make me happy. Say you will be my wife." Then the usual ceremonies followed, you know. I let him ask me three or four times before I answered "Yes," and then he kissed me three or four times, and pestered me to name a day ; so I fixed the 8th of September, which will give me nearly a month to get my things ready in, and he talked all kinds of nonsense, and then he went away. And that is the beginning and the end of the whole affair,' concluded Miss Nettleship, as she flung herself into a chair and yawned, as if it had wearied her.

It was quite evident that her heart was not the chief thing concerned in the engagement she had just entered into. How many hearts go up to the marriage-altar with those white satin-encased and lace-beshrouded figures ? Not many, I fear, in this degraded age of barter, when the term of ' holy matri-

mony' has become a mockery of the shameless open sales of bodies and souls that take place under the sanction of the Church.

'The 8th of September,' repeated Lady William, her matronly mind running on the chief business, in mothers' eyes, of a wedding, namely, the trousseau. 'That is a very short time to get your things in—and, oh dear! wherever am I to find the money to buy them? I really think your grandfather might help us at a crisis like this. Do you think I could venture to write to him, Regina? It would be no use appealing to your uncle the marquis, he is so horribly stingy; but Lord Charles might give something towards your outfit. He married a rich stockbroker's daughter, you know, a woman with no end of money, and I do not suppose that he would feel the loss of a few hundred pounds.'

'Mamma! I will not have you write to any one of them. They have always treated

us shamefully, and I would rather be married in a print dress than owe a halfpenny to their bounty.'

'It is all very well for you to say that, Regina, but how am I to get you a trousseau without help?'

'You must do as others do, I suppose. Get the things on credit, and pay off by degrees. You will be relieved of the expense of keeping me, remember.'

'Yes, yes, Regina! You are very clever! of course that will be the way,' acquiesced Lady William, suddenly remembering that when her daughter was once Mrs. Chasemore, it would not be difficult to get Vivian to help her to pay off debts incurred for his wife's clothes. 'We must begin to see about them to-morrow, my dear. A month is no time in which to get a trousseau ready, and Madame Hélène always keeps your dresses for so long! How astonished the Stingoes will be

to hear the news, and the Farthingales too. I wonder if old Farthingale had any idea of getting him for Selina? If so, they will be terribly disappointed! Shall you write and announce your engagement to them, or trust to their hearing it by chance?

‘I don’t care which I do; but we may as well let them hear it for themselves. I don’t want them to think I am too eager in the matter, and Vivian is sure to tell his cousin, Sir Arthur, the first thing.’

‘Ah, my dear! what a pity it is that you couldn’t have had both the title and the money! You ought to have been “my lady,” Regina! I should have died the easier if I could have heard you called so.’

‘Well, it has never brought you much good, mamma, that I can see,’ was the young lady’s reply, as she took her candlestick and walked off to bed.

She was mistaken in thinking that Sir Arthur

was the first person to whom his cousin would communicate the stroke of good fortune that had befallen him. Vivian was more shy of telling his engagement to Sir Arthur than to any one. He had already supplanted him in their grandfather's will—he had now won for himself the woman whom his cousin had desired to make his wife—and he felt for his double disappointment, and was proportionately delicate in forcing the truth upon his notice. But he took an early opportunity of imparting the news to the Farthingales, who were of course delighted to hear it, and heartily sincere in their congratulations. Selina had never entertained any hopes respecting Vivian Chasemore: had not wished to entertain any. Her heart—such as it was—was fixed upon the baronet, and the rival she had most dreaded was Regina Nettleship. To hear that she would so soon be safely disposed of was the best news in

the world, and she flew at Sir Arthur with the intelligence on the very first occasion of their meeting.

‘You must let me congratulate you, dear Sir Arthur—you must let us all congratulate you, on the very happy news of your cousin’s engagement to Miss Nettleship. She is such a beautiful, elegant creature! they will make such a handsome couple. What a pity they should not have been married during the season. I expect half London would have been in the church only to look at them!’

Sir Arthur was staggered by this intelligence, but he showed no further signs of emotion than were conveyed by his turning very pale and suddenly taking a seat. He had half feared that Vivian’s constant visits to the Nettleships might end in a mutual understanding, but it was a great shock to him to hear it had come to pass so soon and unexpectedly.

‘Are you sure your information is correct, Miss Farthingale?’ he stammered. ‘I saw my cousin yesterday, and he never mentioned the circumstance to me.’

‘How very strange! His engagement must have turned his brain! Oh yes, it is certainly true, Sir Arthur, for Mr. Chasemore told us so himself; and I had a note from Regina this morning, in answer to one from me, in which she says she is to be married the second week in September. If you will excuse me for one moment I will show it you. I left it on my toilet cushion;’ and away tripped Selina Farthingale, to give the unfortunate baronet time to recover himself.

She could not help seeing the effect the news had had upon him, and inwardly rejoiced to think that at least this must put an end to his folly, and leave the field open to herself.

Sir Arthur, left alone, rose from his chair,

and having passed his handkerchief across his brow, paced up and down the room three or four times in quick succession.

‘Going to marry *him*!’ he thought, as he did so—‘going to marry *him*! Curse them both! First, the money—now, the woman! He walks over the course in everything. And she too! false, black-hearted little jade! She threw me over for him, and nothing else. Had his return been delayed twelve hours longer, she would have been engaged to me. Yet where would have been the use? A woman who could go as far as she did, and then deny her own words, would have no hesitation in breaking an engagement, or a marriage either for the matter of that. May ill-fortune follow them both to the end of their days, and may my turn to laugh come yet! That is the best wish I shall have for Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Chasemore on their wedding-day.’

He was interrupted in his reverie by the sound of a soft cough from one of the recesses near the windows, and turning suddenly encountered the modest figure and drooping glance of Miss Janet Oppenheim. The baronet grew red at the discovery. No one could have read his unspoken thoughts, but it must have been easy to connect his restless movements with the intelligence his hostess had communicated to him.

‘Forgive me, Miss Oppenheim,’ he murmured; ‘I believed myself to be alone. But I need not conceal from you that I am rather annoyed that my cousin should have left the news of his intended marriage to be told me by a stranger.’

‘I think it was most inconsiderate of him, Sir Arthur—may I say, ungrateful! Miss Farthingale has only dropped a word before me here and there, but I have heard sufficient to appreciate the noble generosity with

which you welcomed Mr. Chasemore to his home again, and the small sense he has exhibited of your forbearance.'

His conduct had never yet struck the baronet in this light, but now that it was placed before him, he saw plainly what a sacrifice he had made on Vivian's behalf, and felt grateful to the person who had opened his eyes to his own beneficence.

'Indeed, Miss Oppenheim, you rate my conduct too highly. I have only done what I thought to be my duty. But my cousin might have prepared me for this. He has always insisted to me that he was not a marrying man, and although his intentions in this respect could have made no difference to me, one does not care to be taken by surprise in this humdrum jog-trot world.'

'May not Mr. Chasemore have had some ulterior motives for keeping his engagement a secret?' demanded his fair companion,

with the shortest possible glance from her feline eyes ; ‘ perhaps the young lady felt, as she ought to feel, too much ashamed of her choice to wish it made public sooner than was necessary.’

‘ Is it possible you can have heard——’ commenced the baronet, anxiously.

‘ That you once contemplated doing Miss Nettleship the honour of making her your wife, Sir Arthur,’ rejoined Miss Oppenheim, with a low silvery laugh. ‘ Why, her folly was the talk of the town ! Indeed, your great generosity in this, as in other things, is not unknown to your acquaintances, only we cannot add that it has been unrewarded.’

‘ You think her unworthy, then ?’

‘ Unworthy of *that* !’ repeated Miss Oppenheim, with a world of emphasis upon the preposition. ‘ Oh, Sir Arthur ! you are strangely blind to your own merits and the

shortcomings of others ! However one may blame Miss Nettleship, one cannot but congratulate you !

‘ I dare say you are right,’ he said with a sigh ; ‘ I had almost arrived at the same conclusion myself. But I have been a very unfortunate man lately, and I think fate must be against me.’

‘ I should have said you were one of the most favoured of mortals,’ replied Miss Oppenheim, always with the same air of self-depreciation ; ‘ but doubtless we argue on different premises.’

‘ I do not understand your meaning.’

‘ You think of what you have lost in others,’ said the young lady, ‘ and I, of what others gain in you.’

He was just considering what a sweet sympathising little creature she was, and whether he might venture to tell her so,

when the door opened to re-admit Miss Farthingale.

‘Here is Regina’s note,’ she exclaimed ; ‘so now you can read it, Sir Arthur, and convince yourself that my information was correct.’

‘I never had the least doubt of your word,’ he replied, as he glanced at the letter she handed him.

‘There it is, plain enough, you see,’ she continued volubly. ‘They are to be married on the 8th of September and to pass the winter in Rome. I wonder what old Lady William will do without her daughter. She will be dull enough in lodgings all by herself.’

Sir Arthur returned the note without comment.

‘You don’t look over-pleased about it,’ said Selina, for she was jealous and angry at the manner in which he had taken the

news, and could not resist letting him know that she had perceived it. 'Don't you consider the match good enough for Mr. Chasemore?'

'Vivian has money and can afford to please himself, Miss Farthingale. I have nothing to do with his matrimonial affairs.'

'Perhaps you are afraid Regina will not make him a good wife. She is a dreadful flirt, you know! I have heard her talked of myself, with at least half-a-dozen men this season.'

'Then I trust, as she is so soon to be connected with me by marriage, Miss Farthingale, that you will contradict the reports whenever you may hear them,' replied Sir Arthur, as he took up his hat and bowed himself gravely out of the room. Selina's coarse sympathy, which took the form of abuse of her rival, annoyed him. He had not seemed to mind Janet Oppenheim men-

tioning the subject of his rejection, but from the lips of Selina Farthingale he felt it would be unbearable. And he owed Vivian no less a grudge for the secrecy he had maintained towards him, that it had subjected him to hear the news from the lips of the lawyer's daughter.

When the cousins next met, it was very coldly, at all events on the baronet's side, and not many minutes had elapsed before the subject that was irritating him came to the surface.

‘I should have thought that it was at least due to me, as head of the family, to be the first informed of the change in your prospects, Vivian.’

‘Well, look here, old fellow,’ replied the other, in his frank, easy manner: ‘if I had engaged myself to anybody else, it would have been different; but, hang it all! you know, after what had passed between you

and Regina, I *did* feel a little modest about it.'

'Stuff and nonsense!' rejoined Sir Arthur. 'I hope that you will, at all events, let that subject drop for the future. Granted that I liked and admired her, your own taste has endorsed mine; but beyond that, my dear Vivian, matters never went: and you must take my word for it that I would have nothing altered from what it now is, for the world.'

'You're a real good fellow!' exclaimed Vivian, heartily; 'and wherever I may be, there'll always be a knife and fork for you at my table, Arthur. Don't forget that! And now, when will you come round with me and see Regina again? I know she'll be pleased to shake hands with you; and we are to be married in ten days, you know. You will be my best man, won't you?'

'With pleasure! And as for the visit, I

will pay that whenever it is convenient to yourself and Miss Nettleship.'

'Let us say to-morrow, then, and I'll call for you at three. I can't offer to take you to-day, though I am just going there myself; for I have an appointment to meet old Farthingale about the settlements.'

'*Settlements !*' repeated the baronet, opening his eyes.

'Well, not exactly that, old boy,' returned Vivian, laughing. 'You know it is not in my power to make settlements; but I wish Lady William and her daughter to understand thoroughly the provisions of my grandfather's will before the marriage takes place.'

'Oh, exactly! You are perfectly right,' said his cousin. 'At three to-morrow, then. *Au revoir !*' With which he strode away, leaving Vivian to jump into his mail phaeton, and drive to his appointment with the lawyer.

It had come about in this wise: Lady

William had so frequently made allusions to the present penniless condition of her daughter, and her happiness at the idea that she would now be amply provided for during her lifetime, that Vivian had thought it best that both she and Regina should be made acquainted with the conditions under which Sir Peregrine had bequeathed him the fifty thousand pounds. And these conditions being more fitted to proceed from a lawyer's than a lover's lips, he had appointed Mr. Rufus Farthingale to meet him at Knightsbridge that afternoon, for the purposes of explanation.

His interview with his cousin had somewhat delayed him, and when he entered Lady William's drawing-room he found the little lawyer already closeted with the ladies.

'Here comes the hero of the day!' exclaimed Mr. Farthingale, facetiously, as Vivian appeared and saluted the company. 'And

now, as I am rather pressed for time, I will, with your ladyship's permission, at once proceed to business.'

'Can't you spare us the legal details and tell us the plain truth—for once in your life,' interposed Vivian. 'I am sure neither Lady William nor Miss Nettleship will understand your technical terms.'

'It is just as the ladies please, Mr. Chase-more.'

'All I care for, Mr. Farthingale,' said Lady William, 'is to be assured that my dear child is entirely provided for.'

She cared for much more than this. What she wanted to know was how many thousand pounds out of the fifty were to be settled exclusively upon Regina for her sole use and benefit, and Regina wanted to hear it too, although she looked so supremely indifferent to the whole proceedings.

'I do not think your ladyship need have

any fears on that account,' replied the lawyer; 'but, as Mr. Chasemore has suggested, to read out this deed to you would only be to trouble you to listen to a great deal that would prove both uninteresting and puzzling. I had better, therefore, tell you the contents as briefly as possible. The late Sir Peregrine Chasemore left the sum of fifty thousand pounds to his grandson, Vivian Chasemore, under these conditions: the interest of the invested money to be exclusively for the benefit of Mr. Chasemore during his lifetime, and at his death to revert in equal portions to his sons and daughters.'

'But supposing they don't have any?' cried Lady William, eagerly.

At this signal Regina retreated to the window of the back drawing-room, where she remained in silent contemplation of three empty flower-pots, the water-cistern, and a couple of cats fighting over an old bone;

whilst Vivian walked away into the balcony, and amused himself with leaning over the railings and watching the stream of carriages wending their way into the Park. Lady William and the lawyer were consequently left together, and Mr. Farthingale could not help smiling to see the painful anxiety depicted on the lady's face.

‘In that case, Lady William,’ he said, in answer to her question, ‘the interest of ten thousand pounds is to be devoted to a dower for the lifetime of the widow, and then reverts with the remainder of the money to Sir Arthur Chasemore, or his heirs.’

‘Gracious heavens! Do you mean to tell me that Mr. Chasemore is tied hand and foot in such a manner that he is unable to make any settlement upon his widow?’

‘Not if he dies without an heir! But that is rather an unlikely contingency to occur, my lady. And should he die, leaving heirs, the

widow enjoys the whole income for her lifetime, after which it reverts to them. It is a perfectly fair arrangement, and the one most commonly agreed upon in such cases.'

Lady William bit her lip and said nothing. She did not like to betray the disappointment she felt before the little lawyer whom she hated.

'Have you two people done talking?' cried Vivian, gaily, as he peeped into the room. 'Has Mr. Farthingale explained everything to your entire satisfaction, Lady William?'

'Oh, perfectly, Mr. Chasemore. Nothing could be plainer nor more satisfactory,' replied his future mother-in-law. But the minute she found herself alone with Regina, she told a very different tale.

'You've let yourself in for a nice bargain!' she said spitefully. 'That money is tied up in every possible way. If the man dies,

there is positively nothing for you—unless you have a family.’

‘Well, I shall have a family, I suppose—everybody does!’ rejoined her daughter. ‘And I shall be much obliged if you will drop the subject, mamma.’

‘Oh, of course ; that is all the thanks I get for looking after your affairs, miss ! I’m sure I shall be heartily glad when I’ve washed my hands of you altogether.’

‘You cannot possibly be more glad than I shall be,’ were the last words Regina said, as they parted for the night.

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